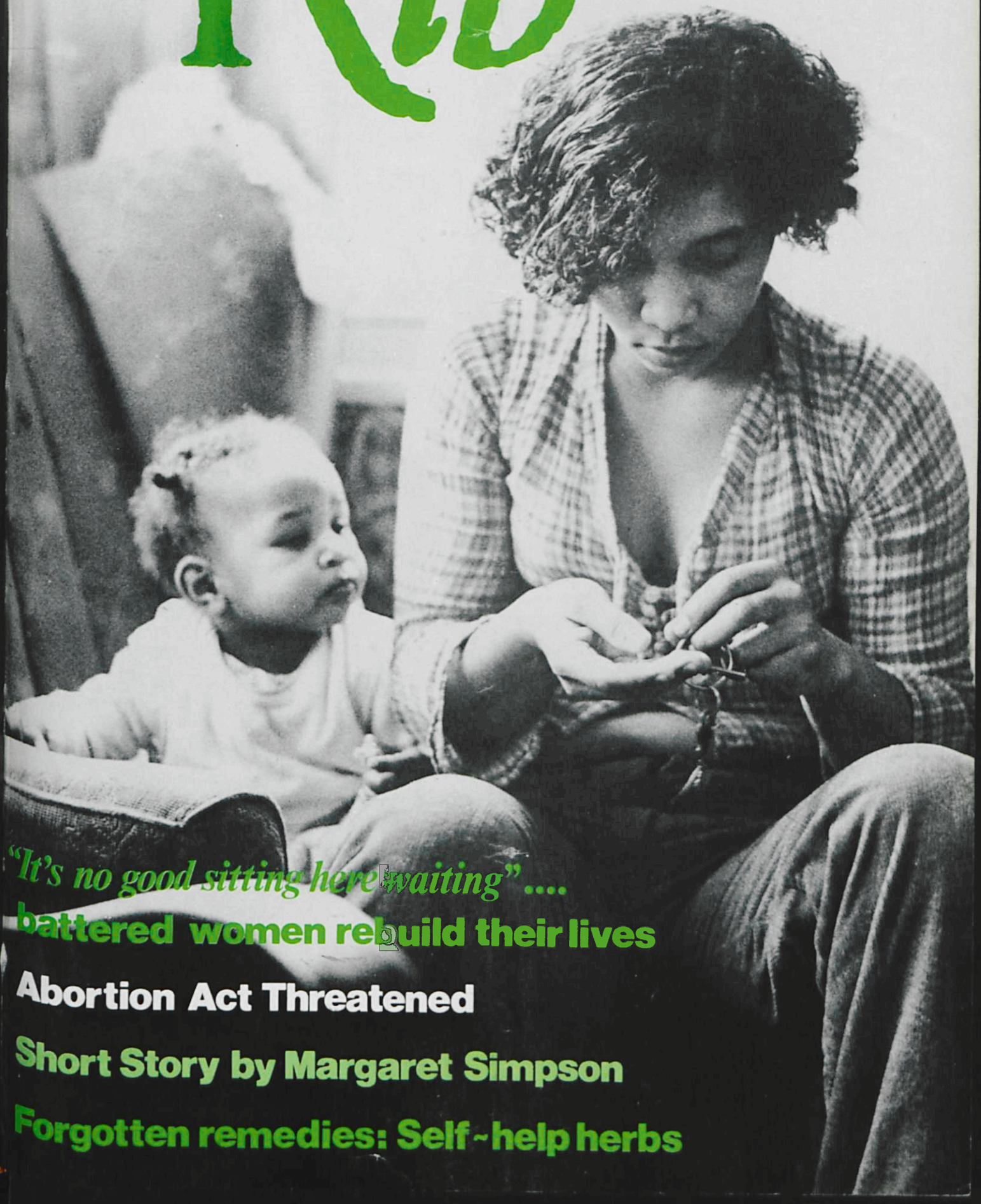
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No 34/30p

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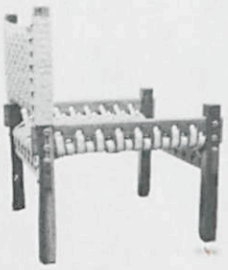
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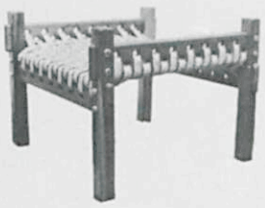
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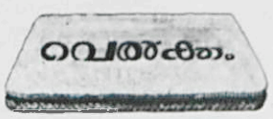
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April 1975
Spare Rib

Front cover:
Kay and Pat,
Acton Women's Aid
Photograph by
Ann Smith

Letters	4	
Shortlist	6	Jill Nicholls lists events, campaigns, groups and pamphlets.
Editorial	8	"Why is your magazine so depressing?" The first of a two-part editorial answering the questions about *Spare Rib* that are most often asked.
Feature	10	Women's Refuge Over the last two years many houses have been set up where women who have been beaten by their husbands can find refuge for themselves and their children. How are the centres organised, and what solutions do they offer? By Eileen Meredith, Marsha Rowe, Marguerite Russell, Lynne Segal and Jo Sutton.
Fiction	15	Till Next Time by Margaret Simpson.
News	17	Abortion Act Threatened James White obtained a Second Reading for his Abortion Amendment Bill on February 7. Report by Liz Warren with a guide for action. International Women's Day Women marched in London's East End and the National Assembly of Women held a celebration meeting on March 8. Western Baby Foods in the Third World Why does Nestle's stand accused? Report by Jill Nicholls. Reports: Start of a Homeworkers' Campaign; Textile Workers in Lancashire; Librarians discuss Sexual Politics; Middlesex Poly : women demand a creche. Classifieds Jobs, Playgroups, Meetings, Accommodation on page 25.
Odds and Sods	29	Inquiries for information and advice.
Law	30	Prostitution and the Law Felicity Crowther unravels the laws relating to prostitution, showing how they lay down what behaviour is acceptable in women.
Arts	32	Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman The diary of Marie Bashkirtseff, who wanted fame above everything, reveals the traps and attractions for women in being An Artist. By Rosie Parker.
Work	36	Women's Employers: General Electric Company What sort of employer did the women take on when they went on strike at Salford Electrical Instruments in Heywood? How does GEC justify its massive redundancies? By Marsha Rowe.
Reviews	39	Books: Lynne Segal reviews Fay Weldon's *Female Friends.* Kids Books: Tomi Ungerer's *No Kiss For Mother.* Film: Margaret Walters reviews *Death Wish* and Sally Feldman reviews *California Split.* Theatre: Michelene Wandor on the Women's Theatre Group's new play *My Mother Said, I Never Should . . .*
Music	43	Discrimination in Orchestras: Women start organising within the Musicians' Union. Northern Women's Liberation Rock Band Manifesto Round-Up of women's musical activity in the United States – at last we have distribution in this country.
Spare Parts	46	Self Help Herbs Ruth Hamblin describes how herbs have helped her deal with common infections and discomforts.

Please send a stamped addressed envelope with all unsolicited manuscripts.

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Spare Rib is produced collectively by the following people, some part-time, some full-time: Rose Ades, Sally Doust, Marion Fudger, Wisty Hoyland, Jill Nicholls, Rosie Parker, Marsha Rowe, Ann Scott, Ann Smith, Jane Wilson.

Women's Dispute – S.E.I. Limited Heywood

Dear Editor,

In her article on the women's dispute at S.E.I. Heywood Marsha Rowe constructed a tissue of lies. The article did not discuss the issues or attempt to analyse this important dispute in any objective way. We note that the author throughout the article trivialised the dispute, avoided any criticism of the Employer (who after all was one of the main main contestants) and wrote the article from an anti-trade union stand point.

We expected vicious treatment from the capitalist press – but we did not expect that people of the 'left' would act as toadies to the boss – we live and learn! Frankly we have learned that the so-called 'left' particularly the 'left' press behaved treacherously. On the one hand posing as friends of the workers, on the other attempting to create splits and divisions and destroy our organisation by their negative approach towards the workers unions.

The article also did a great disservice to the women's struggle for equal pay and equal opportunity in that it failed to give an accurate account of the dispute and discuss the implications in a positive way.

We hope your magazine will not follow the rest of the so-called 'left' press and neglect to publish an accurate account of this important dispute.

We live in hopes of being invited to write a feature on our dispute, how it affected our lives and its significance so far as the development of the women's movement is concerned.

Yours faithfully,
Bella Fullard, Julie Lomax,
AUEW Shop Stewards S.E.I.
Heywood.

P.S. Please do not reduce this letter, print it whole or if you believe in censorship cut it out altogether.

Spare Rib,

Who the hell is Marsha Rowe – by her article an I.S. – Ultra Left. Marsha Rowe turns up just before the end of the strike in Heywood and knows it all.

When I received by 31st copy of *Spare Rib* I was so pleased to see the front page and five within given to this strike – but on reading was appalled. Why could she not give a true and accurate report. I expect this sort of thing from the Tory press, but not from the alternative press which *Spare Rib* claims to be.

Do you not give these women any credit for intelligence – re relationships. Five pages describing relationships – Women – Family – Women – Pay – Women – Union etc etc. The later Women and Union was superb shit, by the way the Union was the A.U.E.W. – you didn't even get that right – but I won't dwell on that, it could have been a misprint.

Could you not have given a section relating to these 400 women in relationship to G.E.C. and what they were up against, or would that have taken too much time and research.

Spare Rib was advertised amongst many left papers in my shop, but no more. In future I will order more copies of the *Morning Star*.

In comparison it gives a truer picture of the women's movement in relation to their unions and employers.

Manchester buzzed with this strike. The week of the General Election, October 10, it had priority over all election news.

People here saw what happened – questioned and know the facts, so thankfully will dismiss your report.

Susan J. Norwood,
1 The Parade,
Rufford Drive,
Whitefield, Manchester.

The article on S.E.I. pointed out for me the worst limitations of *Spare Rib*, because it was a sentimental and passive description of a struggle taken out of context. I think it was sentimental because it only gave an impressionistic idea of the women's feelings, a one off look at what people said, and didn't describe or take into account what I think is the most important thing about such a strike, the ways in which people changed through taking action. Marsha has picked out some good quotes of how the women saw their situation, of their experience of themselves as an oppressed group, but because she separated them out at an existentialist level, under categories of relationships, you don't realise that there was a long history. The consciousness developed over the twelve weeks they were on strike, and it was only slowly that the women realised that their strike was important for other women besides themselves. At first they were curious as to why so many women from women's liberation were coming up to see them, and only later that they saw themselves struggling as women workers, having to cope with kids and housework and bitterly resenting the lack of support from the skilled workers, the men. It's bad to write an article that just sees in a strike what we want to see, and that doesn't show the work that went into organising and learning from that strike.

This is also why the conclusion is in the end passive. It is not enough just to say that the union sold them out, as if whatever the union official did or didn't do could be decisive in the outcome of that strike. Trade unions are only defensive organisations, and the hierarchy will never be more militant than its members. The lesson to be learnt from that strike is not that the union 'always sells us out', but that the union organisation is only a tool for the workers, that it has to be pushed all the time and the real strength is developed on the shop-floor. In S.E.I. the strike was only half successful, the women went back on terms that they'd turned down three weeks before, smarting that their long struggle hadn't won them more. But that isn't the end. In fact, it's only the beginning, because things will never be the same again inside. The lines are drawn between the strikers and the men and women scabs, and the area of struggle is over day to day harassment of known militants, niggling over bonus rates, moving people around, trying to stop stewards from moving freely around the factory. It is out of this continuing warfare that the next eruption will come and the trade union organisation is important as a consolidation of this struggle. Amongst themselves, the women may feel critical of the way the strike went, that the bureaucracy was deliberately slow to call for support action, but in front of management, you have to put up a united front. It's no help to them for scabs to point to articles and say "See, I knew there was no point in going on strikes for twelve weeks. Unions are no good to anybody." By making this kind of public downer criticism, the women quickly lose all the trust which had been built up with external groups, the understanding that women from women's liberation aren't just a totally different kind of woman who has nothing to do with them.

The Working Women's Charter is another example of a blanket statement which is laid on women's struggles. Such a list of demands obscures the fact that women need to assert their dominance within trade union struggle as well as against their bosses. The Charter lays out the conditions under which women can be integrated as equal partners within the work-force, but because it's a set of demands that's hawked around to trades councils and TU branches, it misses out on two crucial things. One is that women may not want to be 'integrated' into the nearest factory or shop, and the other is that their position will only be strengthened in fact as well as in name if they take into account their own needs in developing the struggle. Some examples of this are creches set up during strikes so that all women can attend mass meetings, the fight for union meetings in work time so that women are not hampered by their double labour at home and at work, the collectivity of the miners' wives who refused to be shut out of a struggle just because it was their husbands who were on strike and not them, the popularity of battered wives' houses which has exploded the privacy of the family and can be used as a social weapon even by women who don't actually go there, and, something that I *know* is important although I haven't worked out exactly how, the declining birthrate and the refusal of women to reproduce except when they want to.

It's also disappointing that *Spare Rib* has such good cultural articles, which are incisive and very perceptive, but produces such such muddled pieces on political struggle. When I first started reading *Spare Rib* consistently a few months ago, I felt as if it was a magazine written for middle class women, which gave them some contact with how working class women live and the problems they have to face. The intention was more than a sociological survey or do-gooding curiosity because the women's movement has given us a new radical perspective. For instance, unsupported mothers on social security no matter what their social status beforehand, have an insight into the way capitalist society discriminates against those who refuse to fit into its traps. You drop out of marriage for whatever reason and doors clang in your face. Sure women take different ways out of that situation; some marry back into the middle classes, some join claimants unions, some become radical feminists, some have nervous breakdowns, but it's a moment of choice. The stronger the women's movement is in all its aspects, socially, culturally and politically, the more women will be able to challenge capitalist society.

Maybe for most women who read *Spare Rib* this is only a restatement of the obvious, but what I am trying to get at is what I see as a split between the radical critique of culture, like the book and film reviews, and the much softer and more woolly political line. This is partly

because of the intellectual heritage of Britain, where intellectuals and artists, unlike say Europeans, have kept themselves aloof from politics. The women's movement has done a lot to change this. For example, the Manchester Women's Liberation Rock Band, as well as being women playing together, is also politically committed and this affects the songs they play, the way they play, their relationship to the audience, who they play for. Their development as a musical group is tied to the development of a political movement not tied to a particular organisation. The same is true of, say, the reviews of children's books which are being written or criticised from an anti-sexist point of view. They are as good or as bad as how widely they can be used and circulated.

It's hard for us to come out of the closet of seeing 'culture' as something separate from activity, emotions separate from their expression, and this is part of the struggle of women against oppression.

The ideas that the women's movement has developed against the oppression and exploitation of the family, divisive hierarchies in the labour force, being made a sex object on the street, have the possibility of being realised in the struggle of the working class, and we should recognise this when we talk about factory strikes, rent strikes, pickets of supermarkets and so on. It is the strength which is developed out of these fights which is expressed and articulated in street theatre, feminist music, self help groups and community controlled nurseries. In turn, these support women in a struggle for their own independence and not one where their needs are sacrificed to a wooden view of 'class struggle' i.e. the struggle of productive workers.
From a member of Manchester Big Flame.

See page 36 for article about the GEC combine which owns the SE1 factory in Heywood. Learning more about GEC shows how immensely difficult the situation was for the women.

One of the things we begin to understand from particular trade union struggles is the importance of assessing things like: what people are up against, how long they can hang on, what support they can get. Forgetting these things seduces you into expecting absolute victories. It's too impulsive to come in from outside and see connections, and then impose those connections on other people. This short-circuiting does not solve the actual situation.

The problem the trade union women face about making connections, and ways of organising within the union which will strengthen women are paralleled by the laborious learning of women in the women's movement to make new ways of organising together. Our only weapons are openness, lack of pride when we make mistakes and the knowledge that our whole lives are at stake. We have no choice but to struggle, and that often means unravelling things and starting again.

It's too easy for the Spare Rib *collective to assume that the magazine will be seen as we see it, from the inside, and forget that it can be read as just another magazine amongst a lot of anti-union media. The headline on the cover of that issue, No.31, did not reflect the emphasis in the article and we could have said simply 'Women on equal pay strike'.*

Women's Aid
Dear Sisters,
We in Manchester Women's Aid are very concerned about events which happened at the recent Women's Aid National Conference held in London on February 1 and 2.

Unfortunately, at this conference several allegations were made (which were later confirmed in a letter circulated to all Women's Aid groups by Chiswick Women's Aid) concerning the motives of some groups who have set up these refuges for battered women throughout the country, namely that Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation were jumping on the bandwagon and playing at student politics.

It was alleged that these groups were badly and inefficiently organised and that in the end would 'fold their tents and disappear'.

In reply to these allegations we would like people to read the following thoughts written by some of the battered women in the Manchester Refuge.
Yours in sisterhood,
Caroline Pinden,
Manchester Women's Aid,
218 Upper Brooke Street,
Manchester 13.
After years of being battered, and having to spend a lot of time in Social Service hostels from which I begged my husband to have me back, the only people who have helped me are Women's Liberation.

They were the only ones to care about me and my children. They were the only ones who gave me and my four children a roof over our heads and who made us feel safe. They have been really good to us, and this time I shan't go back to my husband.

I have been at the refuge for nearly a year now, but the woman who started it had been helping battered women for a good two years before that. And many of the women who have come and gone from this house have gained confidence in themselves because of the help which Women's Liberation has given them. I have seen the change in the battered women and in myself just because we have been made to feel welcome when we arrive. Women's Lib was never shoved down my throat. They hardly ever talked about it. They have let me live my life, whilst they lead theirs. They are doing a great job and are really concerned about us battered women and our children.
From Anne.
When I first came to the refuge with my son I didn't care who was running it. I later found out that it was in fact two gay women who started it. Who started it doesn't concern me. All I wanted was to have a roof over my head and to feel just a bit secure. I don't think any one has the right to condemn another person just because of their sexuality. All that's important is that these women have helped us to get on to our feet. I was at the conference in London and was very upset by the accusations that came from Chiswick Women's Aid. I was married to a dominating man for six years. I came to the refuge to get away from all that but letters of the type sent from Chiswick make me feel very insecure again. Why don't the women who are making all these accusations think about the hurt and pain they are causing all over the country by these silly narrow-minded accusations.
From Jenny.
I hitched down to Manchester with my five children from Scotland because I wanted to get a long way from my husband. I arrived at the Women's Aid house in the early hours of the morning, but one of the other women got up and helped me put the children to bed. I have been here several months now, and know that the women who started the house here in Manchester are gay. But it doesn't matter to me what they are. They've helped me and my children so much.

When some of the husbands have come round looking for trouble they've stood with us. We work with them in running the house and this has given us a lot more confidence. As far as I'm concerned the only people I've found to be inefficient are the DHSS, the Housing Department, police and all the other so-called officials who are supposed to help people like me. Although we're overcrowded, and living in one another's pockets, and the house is a hell of a mess, it's a haven for me and my children.
From Marion.

I was very hurt by the remarks made at the conference and in that letter sent by Mrs Pizzey, concerning Gay Liberation, as I am a gay mother who was battered by my husband for fifteen years. I took these accusations very personally and feel hurt and insulted. Did it ever occur to you, Mrs Pizzey, that gay mums also use the refuges?
From Maggie.

Help in Therapeutic Community
Dear Spare Rib,
We are urgently looking for people to live in as helpers in a therapeutic community in London. No previous experience is needed at all.

We are saving someone's life in this community. She is a girl who spent many years struggling with a very severe mental problem, four of which were spent in mental hospital. She finally came to understand what it was that was causing her crippling depressions and other problems – which was a drastically unreal way of being she had adopted out of extreme fear. She undid this split in her being and became much more herself. But she found that the years of almost total isolation she had suffered, due to her real self being locked alone inside, had actually destroyed a part of her – a basic connectedness with other people which human beings need in order to survive. This has left her at a place of having an extreme and desperate need for human contact.

This connection with other life must be grown back through a period of ongoing relatedness between her and a group of people, in a secure situation. The helpers need to be there for contact and emotional support, as well as doing a share of practical and household tasks (cooking, cleaning, etc.). People will not only be of great help in this situation – it is a community which is of tremendous benefit to those helping also. It offers to all involved an opportunity of quite real, honest and warm relatedness.

Will anyone who might be able to help please write to Elisabeth Winkler, c/o Moonfleet Bookshop, 39 Clapham Park Road, London SW4, or phone 01-677 1811. *Please help if you can – your help is needed very badly.*
Yours sincerely,
Elisabeth Winkler.

SHORTLIST

Compiled by Jill Nicholls. Please send any information to Shortlist, *Spare Rib*, 9 Newburgh St, London W1A 4XS.

events

National Conference
The national women's liberation conference is in Manchester this year, April 5–6. Registration £2.50 from 218 Upper Brook Street, Manchester 13.

Women and Urban Renewal
A conference at Liverpool University, April 6–12, aims to bring together women and men from the Third World, Europe and Britain concerned with what women are doing to improve their urban environment. It hopes to deal particularly with problems in Liverpool. Details, application forms and programmes from Eduard le Meistre, Secretary, Architectural Association, 34–36 Bedford Square, London WC1 (01-636 0974).

Northern Ireland
A Women and Socialism conference on Ireland will be held in London on May 10. For details contact Barbara 01-212 5098 (her work number).

campaigns

Abortion
A united action front is forming from Working Women's Charter groups, the Woman's Right to Choose campaign, women's liberation groups in general, and health groups in particular – along with anyone else who is interested.

The plan is to organise a system of immediate response to statements on abortion on local radio, in local papers etc. The proposed system is a 'telephone tree' branching all over the country – so please send two key telephone numbers for your area to Sally Hesmondhalgh, 186 Kings Cross Road, London WC1X 9DE (01-278 4575).

She can also provide a briefing kit with information on how to write to your MP about the select committee and the progress of the Bill.

Legal and Financial Independence Demand
As a result of a conference in December to discuss tactics for campaigning around this demand, about fifteen women have been meeting regularly to try to work things out in more detail. They hope to 1) **Service local groups** by circulating information about proposed legislation and making suggestions about local campaigns 2) At a national level provide a communication network between different groups working on particular areas, work out specific ideas about legislation, and organise publicity (eg press statements and a list of speakers).

Details from Lucy, Helen, Amanda, 7 Killieser Avenue, London SW2 (01-671 2779).

projects

Lesbian's and Psychiatry Collective
A group of lesbians around Manchester are writing a booklet about lesbians confronting the 'caring' professions (medical, psychological etc.). They'd like to hear from lesbians who have had experience of them – what kind of assistance was valuable and constructive, as well as adverse criticisms. Please write – in confidence – to the Lesbian's and Psychiatry Collective, 4 Manor Park Road, Glossop, Derbyshire.

Faces
Joanna Spence is a professional portrait photographer about to start on a project, working with women who don't like their own faces. Any women of any age in the London area willing to work with her in discussing and photographing the way they see themselves, could ring her, 01-226 0367, early morning or late evening, or write to 152 Upper Street, London N1. Perhaps a discussion group could emerge from getting together.

groups

Scottish Lesbian Feminists
Are a new group who recognise that lesbians are doubly oppressed in our society – as women and as homosexuals. They believe in the fundamental unity of the aims of gay liberation and of women's liberation, a unity they feel is frequently negated by the gay rights movement. They formed in fact in reaction to the Gay Rights Congress held in Edinburgh in December.

One of the organisers of that conference referred to "the red herring of feminism which has no relevance to the gay movement" – so the Scottish Lesbian Feminists are calling their newsletter *Red Herring*. It costs 50p for six issues; subscriptions and contributions to c/o Robertson, 10 Royal Crescent, Edinburgh 3.

They hope to fight cases of discrimination against lesbians, and to encourage the rest of the women's movement to support them actively.

Discussion meetings will be held fortnightly on Thursday evenings. Details from Anne Garven (031-229 6156), Linda Blyth (031-229 1472) or Margaret Robertson (031-556 0996).

Leeds Health Group
The contact address has changed from 4 Hilton Road, Leeds 8 and 82 Scott Hall Grove, Leeds 7 to 25 Lucas Street, Leeds LS6 2JD.

Women in Science
These women, studying, employed or just interested in various scientific fields, are working to understand and combat the oppression of women by science and scientists (we can broadcast in colour to the moon, but there's still no safe and reliable contraceptive). It's a new group, and any woman is welcome to join, whether or not working or qualified in science.

Contact Dorothy Griffiths, 7b Chichele Mansions, Chichele Road, London NW2.

Luton Women's Action Group started a Women's Studies course on February 28 at Luton Technical College. It will last fourteen weeks. Babysitting facilities are available. Contact the Secretary, Department of Liberal and General Studies, Luton Technical College.

theatre

Fish in the Sea
A play with music about a working class family in Liverpool, and a factory occupation. It tries to show the links between the politics of the factory and the family, but doesn't go far enough in its analysis of relationships in the family, or between the three daughters and their boyfriends. It's good at showing up male ways of looking at women – when the three girls turn up at a schoolboys' camp in the Welsh hills – but not so good at showing women's understanding of themselves. The girls are defined in relation to their blokes – they go out with an Anarchist or a budding Socialist – and assert themselves by producing babies.

The play's very well worth seeing though, and what's more it's funny. It's by John McGrath, acted by 7:84 (7% of the country own 84% of the wealth, or did



Dorothy Arzner

when the group got its name), and directed by Pam Brighton.

It's on tour in Liverpool March 17–27, Nottingham Playhouse March 30, East Midlands April 1–5. Overall contact address Sandy Craig, 164 Regents Park Road, London NW1.

films

The Independent Newsreel Collective
Is a group of independent filmmakers (both women and men) who have recently come together to provide an alternative to the onesided news coverage run by BBC and ITV.

The Collective will make monthly, twenty minute, black and white newsreels, documenting political events in Britain and examining the way these events, together with the current economic crisis, effect people's everyday lives – eg newsreels on unemployment, housing shortage, cutbacks in spending on health services and education.

In the news coverage at present, women's struggles are either dealt with frivolously or totally ignored. It's essential that the Independent Newsreel change this, by documenting women's existing struggles and showing how the economic crisis effects women.

They'd like to avoid over-concentration on London, and hope to work with people in other parts of the country. If you can help in any way – with information, research or money – please contact the Independent Newsreel Collective, 12–13 Little Newport Street, London W1 (01-734 8508).

Dorothy Arzner
As a follow-up to the 'Women's Cinema' season held at the National Film Theatre two years ago, a more specialised season of the films of Dorothy Arzner, one of Hollywood's very few women directors, will be held at the NFT April 1–23. Of women directors working in Hollywood during the twenties, thirties and early forties – Lois Weber, Alice Guy, Lillian Gish among others – Dorothy Arzner was not only by far the most successful, but the only woman able to build up a coherent body of work within the Hollywood system. However, until recently very little attention has been paid to her work. The enthusiastic reception of *Dance, Girl, Dance* and the 'Women's Cinema' season at the NFT a year later suggested that there was a need to look at her films as a whole and reassess her contribution to the development of a feminist cinema. Luckily, we have been able to find fourteen of her seventeen movies, so for the first time it seems possible to do this. There will be two seminars for discussion (April 10 and April 23 at 8.15 in NFT 3), and a pamphlet 'The Films of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema', written by members of the feminist film criticism group and published by the British Film Institute, to accompany the season.

Arzner's movies go a long way towards challenging and subverting the myths about women which dominate not only Hollywood cinema, but patriarchal culture as a whole. She shows both the compulsive housewife Harriet Craig in *Craig's Wife* and the aviatrix Cynthia Darrington in *Christopher Strong* enmeshed in the same dilemma – how to escape the cultural definitions imposed by patriarchy. It is because she opens up this whole area of contradiction in Hollywood movies that her films are important for feminists today.

For dates and information about temporary membership of the NFT, ring 01-982 3232. For further information ring Claire Johnston, 01-348 1977. All dates are listed in *Time Out*.

pamphlets

Company Day Nurseries
Christine Day
Institute of Personnel Management Report 18; £1.00
This plush pamphlet is intended for managers, and written entirely from the management point of view. A section entitled the 'Benefits of a Nursery' lists advantages outlined by the managers interviewed. They include "a particularly stable, reliable and loyal workforce" and a "good company image". Mothers and children were not asked for their opinions.

Within these obvious limits, it could be a very useful document for women working on childcare.

Sex Differences
Sonja M. Hunt
Vernon Scott Associates; 90p
Sonja Hunt takes certain 'facts' – that bad women drivers are hesitant whereas bad men drivers are foolhardy – and tries to explain them, to assess what in the different behaviour of men and women is innate and what conditioned.

She incorporates work that has been done within the women's movement, for instance on sex stereotyping in kids' books. But she comes out against feminism and real social change.

She tries to challenge biological determinism (that a woman is naturally feminine) by adding the dimension of social expectation and sexual identification. But she only succeeds in suggesting that women may possibly be conditioned. Her 'moderate' stance and empiricist approach prevent her from questioning fundamentally the position she is trying to reassess. She doesn't criticise the conventional terms of the 'debate' on sex differences, and so cannot break out of its limits.

Her question – what is natural, what is social – is wrongly posed. What matters is not that man is naturally bigger, but the social meaning of size, and that meaning is determined by economic and political relations. Since she has no historical analysis of the position of women, she can only come to the politically liberal conclusion that women are naturally nicer than men, so shouldn't spoil it by struggling aggressively for change.

The booklist's worth looking at. Anything feminist or socialist she rates "unreadable", whereas bourgeois sociologists and biological determinists she finds "easy to read". *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* is "not always easy to follow", while *Sex, Career and Family* by Fogarty, Rapoport and Rapoport is "a straightforward account of the conflicting demands made on women". In other words her political objections are phrased as stylistic, so that they can appear to be politically "objective", or not political at all. She makes a partial exception of Oakley's *Sex, Gender and Society* – "Although presenting the case for women, the author manages to be relatively objective and always readable".



Red Rag no 8 is out.
A good issue, with articles on battered wives, Keith Joseph, temp. typists and psychoanalysis, and a critical history – with cartoons – of the London workshop.

Its editorial says "It's become increasingly obvious to us, as a collective, the extent to which we reflect the contradictions inherent in the politics of the women's movement. Though this has slowed us down, we now think it's very important to find ways of expressing these differences in the magazine. In this context we would welcome response to articles".

Letters, articles, donations, orders for supplies and subscriptions (£1.00 for four issues, £2.00 for a sustaining sub) to 9 Stratford Villas, London NW1. 20p in the shops.

Socialist Woman is a journal of the International Marxist Group. The next issue includes articles on the Irish struggle, the NUS women's campaign, abortion, the Working Women's Charter and some book reviews. The subscription has just gone up to £1.20 for six, 20p including postage for one copy. Available from Leonora Lloyd, 21 Highview Court, College Road, Harrow Weald, Middlesex.

The Revolutionary Dynamics of Women's Liberation, Sabina Roberts
This League for Socialist Action pamphlet, based on Engels, outlines 'the way forward' for the women's movement. Available from Ann Fiander, 2 Cobbs Cottages B/S Alresford, Hants, price 15p and 8p postage, or from Compendium Books.□

EDITORIAL

"Why is your magazine so depressing?"

Ann Scott answers the most frequently-asked questions about *Spare Rib.*

What do you mean by a "women's liberation magazine"?

By calling *Spare Rib* a women's liberation magazine, we aren't saying that women will achieve liberation through reading this magazine, or reading any piece of women's movement literature alone. *Spare Rib* forms a *part* of women's struggle for redefinition of their lives. The magazine gives women who are involved in women's liberation one *way* of reaching out to women who would otherwise have no access to the movement. We are confronting the media image of women's liberation, of bra-burning and test-tube babies, on its own ground. We are fighting the media with media of our own.

Spare Rib reflects the actions and concerns of the women's liberation movement. The magazine supports the movement's six demands: for equal pay; free nurseries for all; free abortion and contraception on demand; equal education and job opportunities; an end to discrimination against lesbians and the right to a self-defined sexuality; and legal and financial independence.

The magazine gives women the opportunity to describe and analyse their experiences in their own words. It attempts to show us how women up and down the country are thinking, feeling, changing and organising at work, in trade unions, with kids, at school, at home, in bed.

Spare Rib also exists as a notice board. Women can enquire about women's groups in their area; suggest ideas or actions and give their name and address as a contact; or use information about day care facilities in one area, for example, to bring pressure onto their own local authority.

But Spare Rib is so depressing to read. All the articles are about being in prison, or being anorexic, or not being able to have orgasms, or not getting equal pay. I read magazines to get away from all that.

Supposing you've had anorexia and done time for shoplifting. You're not getting equal pay in your job. You can't make ends meet on your wage and you can't do overtime because you've got to cook the supper. You're too tired to make love. You'd like to get sterilised but the hospital says No.

Women's magazines encourage you to sink your unease in a photo of the ostrich stole which gives Bianca Jagger the flair to get through that self-conscious moment when she arrives at a party. You learn that David Hemmings wears forever-creased beige slimline jeans. You wander into a fictional world of emotionally exploding operating theatres where women drop scalpels because Doctor Love has returned as a world-famous lung surgeon.

There is momentary optimism in the escape, and a sense of what might happen to you if you just hang on a bit longer. But the escapism has also helped to perpetuate women's isolation as housewives, and their exploitation as underpaid, undervalued workers outside the home. Imagine all the women who read magazines "to get away from all that".

It's considered a sign of personal failure in this society to feel, let alone say that life is depressing. We once got a letter at the magazine which showed this in a most direct way: "I have been led into believing I am crazy because I find life so difficult in a male orientated world. Then I read your magazine and I find I am right – life is hard, bloody hard. But the knowledge I am not alone and not crazy, makes me feel so much better and stronger."

Women's liberation questions our inheritance of guilt and enables us to explore what is shared in our situation as women. "Exploring what is shared" is not an abstract statement but a first step towards shaping a social movement through which we can organise together as women.

There is excitement, passion and humour in *Spare Rib* as well as depression. Women *have* successfully struck for equal pay. Women *have* confronted the sexist attitudes of doctors and psychiatrists. Women *have* brought wife-battering into the open with Women's Aid centres. Confidence can grow through example.

I can see that life is hard. But why are you so anti men? You seem to think that sex war is a good thing.

Spare Rib is not anti men but anti the subordination of women as a sex. It's not anti men to say that women will only be freed of their total responsibility for child care when a system of universal state-financed child care enables women at least to *choose* whether they want to spend time bringing up kids.

Spare Rib is opposed to the stereotyping of female and male into feminine and masculine. Femininity requires passivity and self-effacement. Masculinity requires virility, aggression, and dominance in sexual relationships. These stereotypes can be maintained only when neither is challenged. Both sexes are constrained by the social definition of their roles.

We think other women's magazines manifest more of an anti men tendency than *Spare Rib.* However their man-hating is inexplicit. They assume that men are bastards and charlatans who will always leave women. But they also assume a heterosexual norm and endorse a conventional femininity. Being resigned to the seeming necessity of female wiles, ruses and deviousness in love affairs implies manipulative tactics *on the part of women* as well as men. Sex war is thus created and refined through a sophisticated set of techniques for individual survival.

But what have lesbians got to do with women's liberation?

Homosexuality exists as a socially outlawed form of human sexuality but lesbians have been hidden in a particular way. The belief that lesbianism doesn't exist is part of the belief that women are not sexual beings. However lesbians are also feared because their existence and their emerging solidarity as women undermine the sanctity and security of the family structure as we know it today. Society takes its revenge in many ways. Gay women experience harrassment and persecution at the hands of GPs, psychiatrists, the divorce courts, and sometimes their husbands.

But even within Gay Liberation lesbians have needed to organise specifically as gay *women*, not just as gays. The International Congress on Gay Rights, held last December in Edinburgh, was censured by lesbians for its male bias. Lesbians have also criticised *Spare Rib* for its heterosexual orientation.

We think that women have a right to define their own sexuality. We know that our lives are much more varied than they are assumed – or allowed – to be.

The second part of this editorial follows next month.

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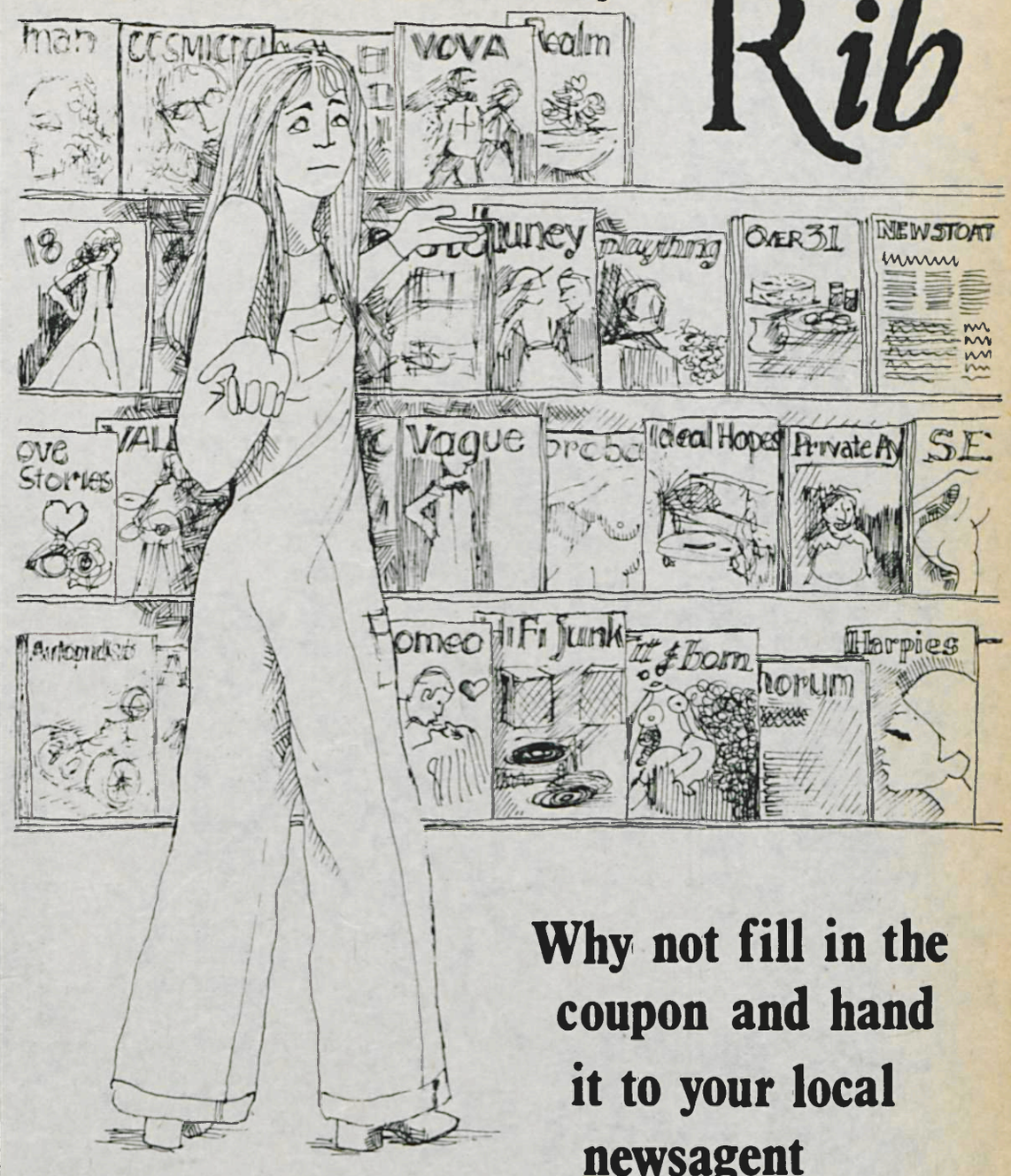
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WOMEN'S REFUGE



Photographs by Ann Smith

Pieta

Pieta,
look down
shed a cluster
of tears
for a rose
like a diamond
that glitters
and fears
the night
and the day
and the long
years ahead
O pity
the flower
whose essence
is dead
that bloomed
for an instant
a long time ago
and since then
has waited
for a harsh wind
to blow
the shadow
the spectre
to Orpheus
descending
for petal
formation
is illusion
defending
O Pieta
have pity
on delicate things
who thought
that a love
was dependent
on rings
who vowed
and who promised
a whole life away
in illusion
that happiness
where needed
would stay
like water
on roses
dependent
for life
O Pieta
send rain
or sharp cut of a knife
Mater dolorosa
This is my life
in sickness and health
in sorrow and strife

After nearly three years, what is the situation now with Women's Aid Centres round the country?
By Eileen Meredith, Marsha Rowe, Marquerite Russell, Jo Sutton, Lynne Segal.

Poems by Anne O'Brien, Acton Women's Aid

Most people have heard of Chiswick Women's Aid. Few people have heard of the other 83 groups attempting to open Women's Aid Centres, or of the 28 centres already open. At least more of us have heard of the problem. Though we might not know that a recent survey found that one wife in every 100 to 200 may be battered by her husband. Yet wife battering as a public issue emerged almost by chance. When Chiswick Women's Aid was opened as a general women's house in 1971, unexpectedly more and more women attempting to escape the brutality of their lives simply arrived at its doorstep.

People do disagree on the causes of wife battering. And, linked to this, they do disagree on the solutions, both short term and long term. One night a woman's husband broke a milk bottle, put red pepper on the jagged edges and threatened to ram it up her. She crawled on the floor begging and pleading with him. Eventually he stopped, washed the pepper off, replaced it with vegetable oil, then went on threatening her. She had to sob and plead with him again, until he decided to beat her up with a stick instead. The next morning she went to a social worker for help, but nothing could be provided – except the telephone number of the nearest refuge for battered women and their children. She went there immediately, taking the children with her.

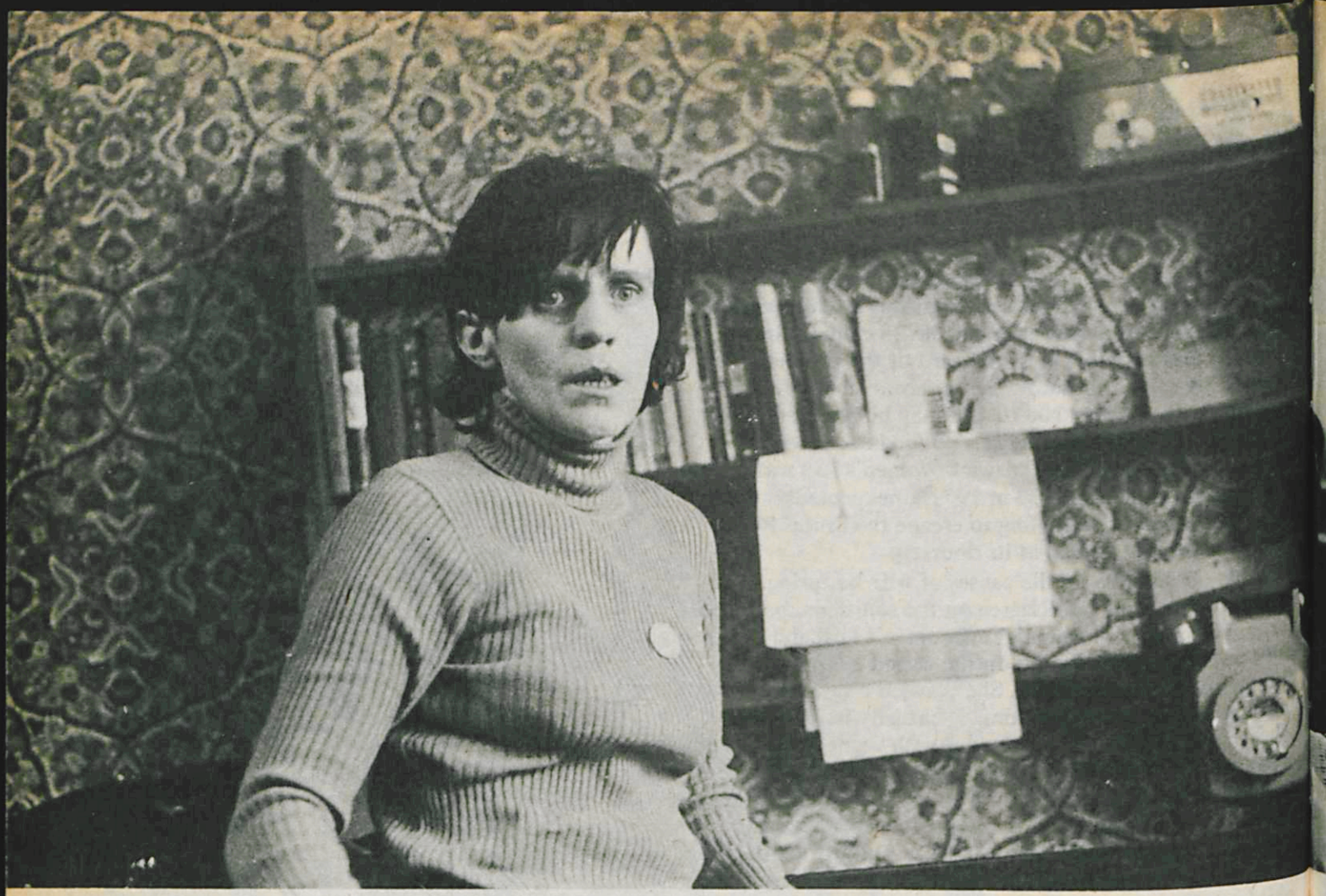
Repeating this, as one of many, many horror stories, can still draw the reaction that the man must have been mentally ill. It was an individual problem which could be cured with the correct psychiatric treatment. A great deal of discussion follows about whether the man was alcoholic or a psychopath. But in fact this sort of degradation of women is fairly frequent. And we ignore the real problem if we treat it as simply the result of a few inexplicably 'sick' and violent men who beat up women. Women's powerless and dependent position in relation to men, particularly when isolated at home with children, is a social fact. Women's suffering in their families and marriages is not reducible to the psychotic behaviour of a few men. Although battering could be seen as a clear physical expression of the oppression of women, it is officially individualised and called either the husband's problem or the wife's.

Help for battered wives from the authorities is extremely limited. This is the reason why 83 groups in Britain are trying to set up women's refuges. They feel that this is one way to start to counteract the isolation of women and offer alternative life chances for individuals and to prove that women are independent people. But it's a great struggle to get hold of premises from Housing Committees.

The groups planning or running refuges have each grown independently, after the example of Chiswick Women's Aid. Some groups have their roots in women's liberation, others are local associations involving local councillors and social service departments. They aim to provide a safe place where the women can practise decision making independently. Although battering happens in all social classes, it is usually working class women who have few alternative places to turn, who come to refuges. Many have left school, been given the impression that they should get married and have done so, and then had kids in rapid succession. Often a woman's husband/co-habittee has forced her not to use any form of contraception so that she has been pregnant most of the time. In his mind she was therefore less attractive to other men and he could go on possessing her. Most frequently a woman tells of how her man has driven all her friends away, never let her out alone except to do the shopping, and generally isolated her from everybody except him and the kids.

In most of the centres, but not all, that have been set up, from ▷





Chiswick onwards, there has been a very strong emphasis on the women who seek help having complete control of what happens at the centre. They are run as communities where any rules are made collectively, by the women in them.

For instance, of the Acton Centre, opened in July 1974, Anne Marcovitch writes: "The women are encouraged to do as much for themselves as possible. All their lives they have been controlled by other people to a degree which allowed no room to find out who they really were or what strengths they really have, and its quite incredible to see a frightened, withdrawn woman emerge into an outspoken and confident human being after a few weeks. The only form of support we offer is a weekly meeting between all of us to thrash out mainly practical issues like who will find an electrician, plus the help each day on a rota basis of each Acton Women's Aid helper. We need to get away from the old patronage ideas endemic in social work of 'client' and 'worker', that is, 'them' and 'us'."

Therefore arrival in a refuge, where all rooms are shared including the kitchen and living room, can be a bit of a shock. Other people in the house are helpful and spent time talking with someone new. The sight of people who have suffered the same degradation and isolation coping well with their lives and beginning to get on their feet is a fantastic morale booster right at the beginning.

At first, the children are very clinging, refusing to leave their mother and crying a lot. To ease some of this initial extra strain most groups have tried to find workers or volunteers to run a playgroup. The kids are often very violent (they've seen how to hurt someone), or withdrawn and need a great deal of patience.

But those aren't the only pressures. The husband/co-habittee often telephones or turns up on the doorstep. At first he is reasonable, and asks to see her. Another woman in the house deals with him and goes and asks the wife/co-habittee whether she wishes to see him. Battering over a period of time creates a fear which the women say is worse than the physical pain, and she is therefore too frightened to speak with him. His usual reaction is, "You're keeping her there". He thinks that, either he must force her to come with him, or that the women in the refuge are making her stay. He is unable to think that she could make a decision for herself. He then goes to a social worker or probation officer and asks for help – so they ring and give his story of how he will reform.

Women may return home at this stage in the hope that the man is telling the truth. He rarely is, and some women go in and out of a refuge five or six times still trying to make the relationship work. It's hard realising that if you are of any importance as a person (which you aren't taught as a woman) then you must make your own life. If the woman still stays in the refuge the man will then cry, say all he lives for is the kids (and there's no one to do the washing up). She might then return to him out of pity. If he's still not successful he then turns nasty, rings up threatening petrol bombs or puts a brick through the window of the refuge. The police are called, and may be helpful, carting him a few streets away, but one officer has been heard to say, "Well, it just shows how much he wants her back". After all this, the woman may still wish to be free of him and is put in contact with a solicitor and divorce or separation proceedings are started.

The procedure takes anything from three months if undefended onwards and during that time a safe place is still needed, which is still the refuge. (Financial arrangements and custody of the children may drag on much longer). This gives a fair length of time in which a woman can share in the daily running, get her confidence back and plan her future. She can start looking at why battering happens, and why violence in the home is treated differently from that on the street. In law, assault is the same wherever it happens, but the interpretation is different when it happens between a man and a woman living together. Why does being married give someone the right to beat you up? She might think about how a man can feel the weight of having to keep a job to earn money to support a wife and kids and begin to resent it. But why does one person in a marriage have to be dependent on the other? And why are women expected to suffer anything to keep a family as one unit? (One probation officer once told one of us that he had been doing long term 'marital casework' where a woman was being beaten up. After six years the husband stopped battering and they'd been together two years with no violence. From the way women in refuges have talked about their attitudes to professional help, we suspect she gave up telling the probation officer as it wasn't achieving anything for her, let alone the fact that she was expected to suffer for so long). Do you need to be attached to another person to have an identity? And what about the enormous problem of dealing with the guilt which is put on all women if a relationship doesn't work – from not putting the Sunday dinner on the table at the right time, onwards. It's like the fairy tale



of the princess and the frog. She kisses the frog and it turns into a handsome prince and they live happily ever after. If she kisses the frog and he doesn't change, then she's taught to think that there's something wrong with her kiss – not with the frog.

Eventually the woman may get her divorce and look for somewhere to live away from the refuge. What are the long term solutions for her? Private housing is hard to get when you've got kids. She may have some Council accommodation which she had shared with her husband. Except for a few sympathetic councils she has to wait until she gets custody of the children at the end of divorce proceedings before the ex-husband is evicted for under-occupation. If she returns to what was once called the marital home, after he has been moved out it is likely that he will return to harass her or even beat her up again. She can go to court to obtain an injunction, non-molestation order to keep him away – as she could have done as soon as divorce proceedings started months ago. But injunctions cannot be upheld until after they have been broken – that is, until she has been beaten up again. Then he has to be found and returned to the court. Once there, he is often dealt with leniently (for example, a warning or £5 fine) and may well return again. She *still* needs somewhere to live where she and the children will feel safe. She could share long term housing with other women who understand the situation, so that there would always be friendly support.

The refuges do offer another way of living, giving the idea that a future existence as a mutilated nuclear family is not always absolutely necessary. Obviously one can't live with anyone, but the initiating groups in refuges are becoming aware of the need for a real alternative where child rearing is shared, where managing on Supplementary Benefit is slightly less harassing. Chiswick Women's Aid has existed the longest and therefore has come across these problems – it now has nine longer life permanent houses, which have none of the crises involved in people arriving on the doorstep at all hours of the day and night. Some houses are squatted and therefore have the hassles that are involved – but at least they are women fighting alongside each other. Other refuges also going for a long time help women to squat with each other in the local area where they will remain in touch with the centre. That's one of the answers to the problem of battered women.

But there are other attitudes in the movement for battered women and a few people trying to find other answers. Some people see battered women as inadequate and scarred (in the psychological sense, rather than the physical burns, bruises, bites and stabs) who will always need looking after. Up until now the women depended on their husband and now they should lean on the workers in the refuge – until their future is decided within the norms of family behaviour. In these few houses a warden is seen as necessary – or how else will the women abide by the rules. The strength of women who have survived living in fear and isolation is ignored and never used as a platform from which to build a new life. A warden, by her very continuity over a length of time in comparison to the women needing to stay, has more experience and it is in her interest that the house is run in her own ways. This means that, inevitably, the warden becomes the chief decision maker (for example, what time women should be in at night so that she can lock them up) and nobody else gets a chance.

The Lambeth Women's Aid was opened at the end of 1973, in a derelict squatted house without gas or electricity. After a year of struggles with the council, a new house was given to the Women's Aid group plus a grant of £10,000 for five years. However, the Social Services Department insisted the someone, a warden, live in the house. The 'warden' there, Iris Ethrington, is one of the original battered wives. She admits that the Social Services probably insisted on a warden so that a 'responsible' person would be there to make the rules and see them kept. However, she says that the women there do have complete autonomy in the way the centre is run, and that there are no rules at all apart from the rule that no men should go there. She says they do not want to become a part of the establishment.

Nevertheless, she did say she thought that there is a danger of Women's Aid centres in the country being taken over if set up entirely by the Social Services. Then they could become just another hostel and very grim. A few Women's Aid centres do approach the typical hostel situation. The Liverpool Women's Aid, which opened three weeks before Christmas, has a woman magistrate as one of its two trustees. There is not only a warden there but also completely separate flats – each with a yale lock and taking just one family. Here, marital care work with a view to making the family stay together is common – and not surprisingly the women usually go back to their husbands feeling even guiltier, and in despair because the refuge was the very last place she could turn to for help. Holding a marriage together is seen as success, rather than the woman making▷



an independent decision.

This is in line with thinking within the Department of Health and Social Security, who have been collecting statistics to prove that marital breakdown is the chief cause of homelessness! They also suspect that most refuges deliberately break up a marriage – whereas they merely give women slightly more choice than they were given before. But all decisions must come from the people who live in the houses. This is continuous hard work for people helping in the houses – there are women coming and going, so that the learning process is started over and over again. When women go out all night and forget the kids it's easier to make rules than to understand that it's the first choice of freedom for years and she was right to experiment with that.

So there is direct conflict between the ways people find answers in refuges – and which way it will go in the future is in the balance. The rule making, wardened houses are officially approved of and already receive more resources. It's a struggle for those who feel that the autonomous and collective organisation of women in the centres is their most important feature. 'It's a place where women make really good friends for life', Iris Ethrington said. We need the support of more women, either by more women working in the refuges, or talking with those of us who are, making us think about the implications of our actions, giving praise and criticism. A refuge puts you in contact with a number of women you mightn't usually meet – it's a learning process on both sides. We're struggling to find answers■

The second National Women's Aid Conference was held in the Congregational Church Hall, Chiswick, London on February 1 and 2, 1975. Representatives from Women's Aid groups from all over England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland met together at the Hall at 10.30 on the Saturday morning. Most were women, but there were also five or six men from various support groups. Some of the groups already had houses and had been running them as refuges from anything from two and a half years to two days. Others were recently formed or still battling with their local authorities for accomodation of some kind.

There was an outline agenda prepared, with suggestions for workshops and representatives joined whichever group most interested them in one of the small rooms or corners available. Many of the problems which arise in battling with local authorities for recognition of the particular situation battered women find themselves in came up in each workshop, various means of tackling these – from discussion of what could be done to help the husbands change to forming housing associations as a means of overcoming the accommodation shortage – were also gone into.

After lunch everyone came together in a plenary session to discuss particular points. One of these was the Private Member's Bill introduced to the Commons recently by Jack Ashley, MP, which would lay it down as a principle of law that in cases where a husband has been convicted of an 'act of violence' against his wife, he would forfeit all right to a share of the matrimonial home. It was generally decided that the Bill could not be supported totally in its present form but that it could provide a usual forum for debate in the House. A group of women were mandated to go and see Jack Ashley about it and write a short document pointing out the pitfalls.

A proposed statement of aims and objectives for the Women's Aid movement drawn up at the recent conference of North West groups was discussed.

On the Sunday the whole day was spent in plenary session. The question of a National Coordinator was discussed first and it was agreed that all groups were part of a 'National Women's Aid Movement' and that a National Coordinator was necessary, both to disseminate information between groups and to concentrate pressure at national level on DHSS, Urban Aid grants applications and so on. It was decided to convene a further conference of delegates, one from each of the 83 groups in existence, to meet in Manchester on March 1 1975, as an assessment committee to discuss the position of National Coordinator, put up nominations, discuss funding and hear reports. Manchester Women's Aid undertook to organise this and notify all groups.

Battered Women: How to use the law by Tess Gill and Anna Coote. A useful pamphlet published by N.C.C.L., 30 pence from Cobden Trust, 186 Kings Cross Road, London WC1X 9DE

Acton Women's Aid – ring 567 4708. Angela White – day, Anne McDebitt – evenings.

TILL NEXT TIME

by Margaret Simpson

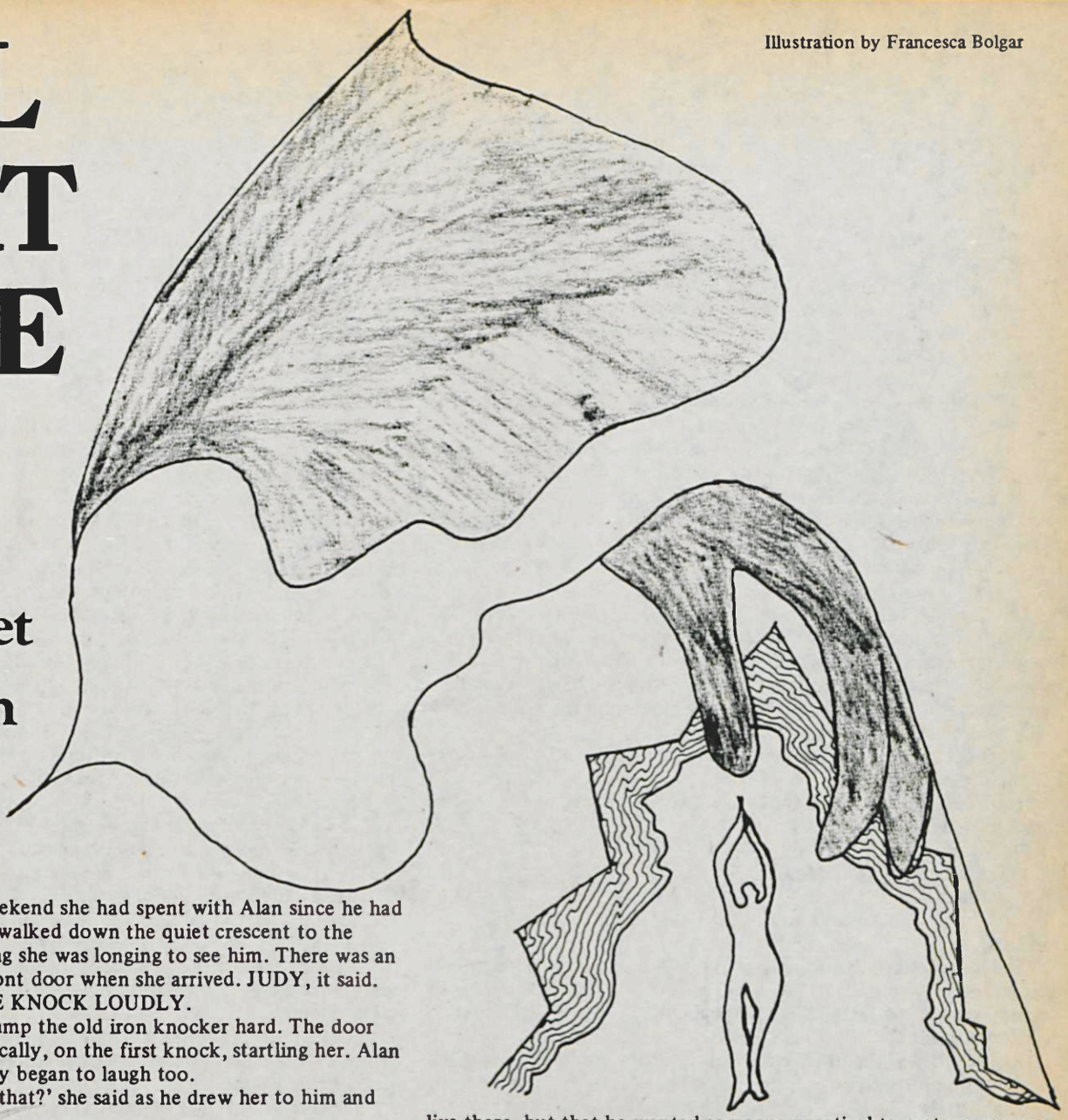


Illustration by Francesca Bolgar

It was only the second weekend she had spent with Alan since he had moved to London; as she walked down the quiet crescent to the house where he was staying she was longing to see him. There was an envelope pinned to the front door when she arrived. JUDY, it said. BELL BROKEN. PLEASE KNOCK LOUDLY.

Judy reached up to thump the old iron knocker hard. The door opened suddenly, dramatically, on the first knock, startling her. Alan stood there, laughing. Judy began to laugh too.

'What sort of joke was that?' she said as he drew her to him and embraced her.

'I didn't set it up to happen like that,' he said. 'I'd only just pinned up the note when I saw you coming.' He tilted her head and they kissed, gently and expressively, for a long time. She was standing on tiptoe and gradually her lack of balance and the discomfort in her toes and calves outweighed the pleasure elsewhere. She drew back.

'Let me take my mac off.'

'No, don't do that,' he said. 'We're going out.'

'Now?' She had had plans for going up to his room, for talking and drinking and fucking.

'Yes now,' he said. He grinned at her. 'We can come back to bed later. I want you to look at a flat I'm thinking of buying.'

'Buying?' said Judy with disbelief. He had always been very scathing about the house that she and Mike, her husband, had owned.

'I thought you didn't want to belong to the property-owning democracy.'

'That was last week,' said Alan. He pulled on his donkey jacket. 'This week I'm sick of paying rent.'

'Can't we go later?'

'No.' He spoke decisively. It was one of the things she liked about him, the way he said what he wanted. There was none of the it's-all-the-same-to-me, let's-do-whatever-you-want stuff with which she and Mike had trammelled each other for years, neither of them ever knowing what the other really wanted, and both sacrificing themselves to the other's imagined needs. So she swallowed her irritation, left her bag in the hall, and followed Alan out into the street again.

Alan was in one of his tense, purposeful moods. He walked fast, holding her hand and telling her all the time about the flat: how much they were asking for it, why they wanted a quick sale, that the guy who lived there was a friend of Jim Alpers, that he taught at Birmingham University and only came down at weekends. He told her that he liked the place a great deal, and thought he would like to live there, but that he wanted someone practical to cast an eye over it for the sort of disadvantages he wouldn't notice.

'Cupboard space, you know, that sort of thing,' he said vaguely.

'You must be able to see how many cupboards there are,' said Judy. She was breathless from walking so fast; every few yards she had to skip to keep up.

'Oh well, you know what I mean. Power points. Drains. The kitchen. Whatever else you're supposed to notice. You see, I don't even know.'

She said nothing, both irritated and pleased that he was consulting her about where he was going to live. It marked a change: it smacked of a joint decision. She felt safer than she had done for some time. All the same, she had better be careful, she told herself firmly. The last thing she wanted was another marriage.

It was a woman who opened the door of the flat. Alan introduced Judy by her married name.

'This is Judy Chivers,' he said. It surprised her, and it rankled. She didn't write under Mike's name, and she never called herself Chivers now. She had still been with Mike when she met Alan, perhaps that was why he thought of her as Judy Chivers. It showed how rarely he used her second name. She must speak to him about it – but not now. There was no point in making an issue of it now.

The woman, whose name she had not taken in, showed them into the living room. The man of the flat, who was tall and gaunt, rose to greet them.

'This is Judy Chivers,' said Alan again.

Judy looked round the living room as she was expected to do. It was a big, airy room, L-shaped, with lots of pine cupboards and bookshelves and a kitchen area at one end. Everything was immaculate, tidied to persuade them that this was a beautiful, self-tidying flat, just the sort of place they wanted to buy. The couple watched her, waiting for her approbation. She was the little woman, come to set▷

her seal of approval on her husband's decision. Rebellious, she said nothing.

'Well?' said Alan. 'What do you think?'

'It's OK,' said Judy, reluctantly. She could hardly say anything else, she felt, with the couple looking on. 'What do *you* think? You're the one who's going to live here after all.'

'I like it.'

'Well then.'

'It's nice having the kitchen in the living area,' said the woman brightly, addressing Judy directly. 'It means you don't miss all the fun, you don't have to shut yourself away to get the meal.'

'I suppose not,' said Judy. Inside her Superwife was muttering: there's no hood over the cooker, what about smells then eh, what about cooking smells?

'Did you want to have a look at the cupboard space?' said the man. 'There's an automatic waste disposal unit, did you notice that? And we're leaving the carpets of course.'

'Are they included in the purchase price?' said Judy, looking down at the faultlessly unobtrusive brown carpeting. The rebelliousness had left her, and apathy now oozed in her veins. She felt as if she was catapulting through all the emotional phases of her marriage at top speed: it had taken years to reduce her to this state of passivity last time. 'What about cooking smells?' she said gloomily, 'I see there's no hood over the cooker.'

The flat was viewed; now was the time for pleasantries. Judy and Alan sat on opposite sides of the room; the pert, dark-haired woman, whose name was Moira, was curled up on the bed by the wall. The man was getting them all drinks. He and Alan were having a loud conversation across the room about Jim Alpers and the politics of the economics department at Birmingham.

'What do you do?' Judy asked Moira quietly, beneath the men's conversation.

Moira had been listening to the men. It took a second for her to focus on Judy's question.

'I'm in publishing,' she said.

'Oh. Who do you work for?'

'Saltermann.'

'Oh do you. You must know Mark Vesey then. And Angela Shorter.'

'Yes.' She looked enquiringly at Judy. 'What's your connection with them?'

Judy gave a small grin of embarrassment.

'You publish me.'

'Really?' It was the other woman's turn to be embarrassed. 'What was your name again?'

'Shaw. Judith Shaw.'

'Oh. But – ' she looked at Alan, who was now glancing through a *Private Eye* he had found on the sofa, ' – that's not the name he introduced you by when you came in, is it – ?'

'Judy's very complicated,' said Alan, who had been paying more attention to the conversation than he had let on. 'She has two names.'

'It's not complicated at all,' said Judy crossly. 'Lots of women have two names. Anyway you're the only person who uses my married name now.'

'Your husband apart,' said Alan, his eyes down on the magazine once again.

'Judith Shaw,' said Moira quickly, a cover for her fascination at the antagonism between them. 'D'you know, I thought I knew your face when you came in, but I couldn't think where I'd seen you before. It must be your photograph on dust-jackets.'

The man joined the circle with his tray of drinks. Moira told him – as if he had not already heard – that Judy's name was Shaw, and that Saltermann published her books. The conversation resumed, but the axis had shifted. It was Alan who was the silent one now, and Judy who was confident and lively.

He was uncommunicative on the way home, hunching his shoulders and keeping his hands in his pockets. Judy did not know what to say. She wanted to bridge the gulf between them, she didn't want to quarrel and yet she felt that she was in the right and there was no apologising. Finally, as he was putting on a record, back in the room where he was camping, she crept up behind him and slipped her hands inside his shirt, hugging him to her.

'Don't be grumpy,' she said. 'I love you. It's lovely to be here.'

A moment later, 'Good,' he said, prising himself away. 'Stick around.' He turned and kissed her, and to her relief the antagonism between them was soothed. Then abruptly he broke away again. He was going to cook a meal, he said. No, he didn't want any help, he didn't want her even to come to the kitchen, she would be too shocked by the squalor.

'Look what I found in the sideboard,' he said, pushing open the door of the ugly, enormous sideboard with his foot. Inside were piles and piles of old magazines.– *Encounter, New Society, The New Statesman, Punch,* the odd *Playboy*. 'Treasure trove,' he said. 'Amuse yourself reading some of this lot. Take it easy. Relax. In fact,' he rummaged through one of the piles. 'There's the very article you might like to read here. About an ex-girlfriend of mine.'

'An ex-girlfriend of yours?'

'Yes. An ex-girlfriend of mine.' He pulled an old *Encounter* from the pile, opened it, folded it back at the opened page and handed it to Judy.

'Anna MacManus,' said Judy. She looked up. 'I didn't know she had been a girlfriend of yours. How long ago was that?'

'A few years ago,' he said lightly. 'Fitted her in between Susan and Jackie.'

'What was she like?' she said, curious and jealous. Anna MacManus was an economist, well-known in left-wing and women's circles.

He gave a big grin.

'Very sexy,' he said.

He disappeared to the kitchen. Judy sat staring at the article, trying to make sense of her feelings. Anna MacManus. If he had had girlfriends as high-powered as Anna MacManus what was he doing with her. But that was ridiculous, she told herself. It wasn't like that at all, for all she knew Anna MacManus was as insecure as she herself was, appearances were nothing. She switched on the shabby table lamp and sat in the yellow pool of light to read the article. It was a review of a political autobiography which Anna had published the previous year. The writer was mocking Anna, picking on some of her more naive statements – and they did sound naive – and belittling her experiences. Judy read it with relief. It was all right, Anna was not high-powered after all, she could make an idiot of herself like anyone else.

'Have you read it, the autobiography?' she asked Alan when he came back, bearing omelettes and toast.

'Yes,' he said. 'She showed me the manuscript.'

'What did you think of it?'

'Rather less than he did. The reviewer.'

'Oh.'

'Yes,' he said, with a certain bitter relish. 'I think she deserves all she gets if she publishes rubbish like that. I told her she would regret publishing it.'

'How gratifying for you. To be right,' said Judy. Her mind was whirling, she did not know what her reactions were, or why she was so hurt and angry.

For the second time that day they tried to ease their differences physically; he locked the door, and they went to bed. But this time it did not work: she was aroused easily enough, but his climax left her alone, unsatisfied, hanging on a clifftop of tension and misery. As they rolled on to their sides she felt the hot tears seeping through her eyelids. She turned over, away from him, so he should not see, but the tears kept coming, falling warm on to the pillow, and sooner or later she knew she was going to sniff, or sob, or both.

'Hey,' he said, when the sob came. He leaned over her and touched her wet face. 'Hey. What's all this about?'

She told him, assembling the muddled feelings as best she could. She told him he hated her for her writing, that he was envious and didn't want her to have any identity of her own. She told him that he had been getting at her by showing her the article about Anna, that he had done it because he was irritated with her for not falling into the wifely role when they went to see the flat.

'Lover, you are paranoid,' he said, hugging her to him and stroking her gently. He had just shown her the article because he had thought it would interest her, he said. He had been irritated at the flat only because she didn't seem to be interested in where he lived. Maybe he was a bit envious, he conceded, as he obligingly produced a tissue for her face, but it was ridiculous, paranoid, to draw elaborate parallels between herself and Anna MacManus. Silly Judy, he said, and stroked her hair away from her face.

There was no budging him, and anyway, he was kindness itself now that he knew that he had hurt her. And she, having spoken her pent-up hurt, felt cleansed. She lay with her head on his shoulder, luxuriating in the warmth of his flesh. She loved him. She forgave him. Till next time■

Margaret Simpson's second novel, The Chrome Connection, *the story of a political kidnapping set in London is to be published on April 10th by Andre Deutsch, price £2.50, and can be ordered from your local library.*

NEWS

ABORTION ACT THREAT

On February 7 James White's restrictive Abortion Bill which seeks to amend the 1967 Abortion Act was given a Second Reading by 203 votes to 88.

The women's movement has only three months to organise itself to defeat this dangerous measure.



James White MP

James White's bill had eleven sponsors. This is what some of them had to say in the House of Commons debate on 7 February, 1975:

"I, in common with many other hon. Members now in the House would never have supported the 1967 Abortion Act. I would have voted against it on moral grounds." *Ian Campbell MP*

"The ease of abortion coarsens our society and undermines respect for the sanctity of life and is the penultimate step to euthanasia and a Hitlerian disregard for the disabled, the weak and the aged." *Leo Abse MP*

"It is wrong to think that the argument about the destruction of baby life is inspired by the Roman Catholic Church. It is that Church which has taken a lead in this matter, and in my opinion, for what it is worth, it deserves full marks for doing so." *Dan Jones MP*

"I voted against the 1967 Abortion Act. I do not like the principle of it. I am opposed to abortion." *Teddy Taylor MP*

"I admit openly in this Chamber that I support the objectives of the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child." *Nicholas Winterton MP*

"I shall make my objection to abortion on one fundamental ground. I believe that it is a grave sin." *Donald Stewart MP*

We have been warned. This pretends to be a bill designed to clear up some abuses in the small remaining commercial sector of the abortion market (which now deals with less than 20 per cent of British abortions). In fact, it is the first stage of a measure which aims to destroy the 1967 Abortion Act and drive women back into the arms of the criminal abortionists.

The sponsors of the bill have openly admitted what their real intentions are, and so have their hangers-on. Alan Clark, the Conservative MP for Plymouth, Sutton had this to say in his local paper just before the debate:

"There will be a considerable reduction in the numbers of *au pair* girls and sundry slags on the Continent just drifting in and having their abortions." *Western Sunday Independent* 2Feb.

Five days later, he said in the House of Commons:

"I support the Bill. Not only are its detailed provisions desirable, but it may be *the first stage in a process which will ultimately revise the Act* which many people in this country regard as profoundly corrupt and evil."

James White's About Turn

James White, the Labour (and T&GW) MP for Glasgow, Pollok (see Issue 32) was initially committed to destroying the 1967 Abortion Act. In an interview with the *Scottish Daily Record* on December 5 1974 his Bill was described as "designed to alter the present legislation by making abortion more difficult to obtain." Commented the paper, underneath a photograph of James White: "White is particularly concerned about the social clauses in the Abortion Act, clauses which, he says, are leading to widespread abuse." ▷

NEWS

After Christmas, Mr White travelled South to Westminster, away from the cosy embrace of the Glasgow Catholic Hierarchy. Here he received a distinctly chilly reception, especially from the women in the trade union movement. The hostility of the women in the Labour Party, the Co-op, the Transport and General Workers' Union - of which he has been a life long member - and of the Women's Charter Campaign made him realise he was in trouble, trouble that might eventually reverberate in his constituency. He backtracked immediately:

"Although there has been some talk about what is intended I take no hard line on abortion . . . I and my fellow sponsors (*see quotations from their speeches above*) give our word to the House that no tricks are being played. We want to make the 1967 Act work as it was intended to work." *Hansard* Feb 7.

There was no reference in Mr White's speech to the fact that his attention had originally been drawn to the abortion issue by the sight of a group of nuns demonstrating against the Abortion Act. He had revealed this touching story to *The Scotsman* on January 31, only one week previously. Now his profile was so low, it nearly scraped the bottom of the barrel. His sponsors, however, as we have noted, were rather less discreet about their real intentions.

Select Committee

The Bill got its Second Reading by a 2:1 majority. Only 2 women were permitted to speak, Renée Short and Lena Jeger. It was then agreed, without further division, to set up a government Select Committee of 11 members. This Committee has very wide powers to "send for persons, papers and records".

The Catholic Lobby will be concerned to ensure that the Bill returns to the House of Commons for its Report Stage and Third Reading as quickly as possible. Otherwise there may not be enough time to enable its recommendations to be debated and turned into law during the remainder of this parliamentary session. So it will try to force it out of Committee by June at the latest, and earlier if possible, *unless the volume of evidence the Committee receives is so great that it cannot complete its business in time.*

It is up to the Women's Movement to ensure that every piece of evidence that might be relevant to the Committee's deliberations is proferred to it and that oral evidence is offered in addition to written evidence.

If the Select Committee is followed by a Standing Committee of the House of Commons (and this is not yet known as we go to press) then its members will be chosen by a Committee of Selection presided over by Hugh Delargy, a Roman Catholic Labour MP, who said during the debate that he had voted against the 1967 Abortion Act without "the slightest compunction". This fact, coupled with the caucus of Roman Catholic Labour Party whips, will make life very difficult for reformers in procedural matters which are complex, hidden and devious, and cannot be easily explained to the public.



Defending the Abortion Act: Meeting at Central Hall, Westminster on February 7

White's Bill

James White's Bill will form the basis for the Select Committee's agenda. These are the major provisions it contains (there are also several others):

1) It makes it more difficult to obtain legal abortion on grounds of physical or mental health considerations. The words 'grave' risk and 'serious' injury to health are inserted into the 1967 Abortion Act. One of the doctors involved in the decision must have been registered for at least 5 years - a provision not made for any other medical procedure.

2) It puts private clinics under the supervision of NHS consultants or their equivalents. This clause was thrown out by parliament nearly a decade ago as being needlessly restrictive. The Lane Committee on abortion also considered it and threw it out.

3) It excludes foreign patients

4) It bans abortion after 20 weeks

5) It throws the onus of proof onto the doctor. This reverses the normal English legal tradition that a person is considered innocent until proved guilty. It is a sinister move and one that all health workers would do well to resist.

6) No girl under 16 years shall be advised except in the presence of her parents. This is peculiarly nasty and bears the hall mark of Leo Abse MP who actually drafted the Bill. If girls under 16 get pregnant, this is often because they are very unhappy at home, don't get on with their parents, and seek affection outside.

The Bill makes provision for the regulation of referral agencies and dangerously restricts the provision of lay counselling services. It also states the following: "A person giving to any pregnant woman any advice or information to which this section applies shall at the same time give her advice as to *available alternatives* to such treatment."

Has any *Spare Rib* reader experience of what "alternatives" the anti-abortion *Lifeline* organisation offers its victims? There are persistent rumours that if a client insists she needs an abortion, she is told simply that abortion is sinful and dangerous, and she is not directed to any abortion agency. This of course is not counselling but bullying. (The Chairman of *Lifeline* Trustees is Jill Knight MP, a sponsor of James White's Bill.)

Please send any information you have on this to Sally Hesmondhalgh, A Woman's Right to Choose, 186 Kings Cross Road, London WC1X 9DE (278 4575).

Please do one or more of the following:

1) Get a resolution passed in your constituency by whatever group you belong to, professional, political, conservation, women's, anything. Send it to your MP with a covering letter telling him or her how strongly your group feels about preserving the 1967 Abortion Act intact. Send a copy to Barbara Castle.

2) Write a letter to your MP and get your friends and neighbours to sign it too, pointing out that parts of White's Bill are not concerned with merely rectifying abuses, but are designed to wreck the 1967 Abortion Act.

3) Your MP will almost certainly reply that he is "waiting-to-see-what- is- in- the- Bill- when- it-returns- to- the- House". As soon as the Bill is published in the press, write to him again, pointing out the bits you don't like. If in doubt, ring Sally Hesmondhalgh, who will advise you.

4) Send all replies you receive to Sally Hesmondhalgh, who is collating them.

At the moment, your MP feels he will be in less trouble if he votes for White, than if he votes against. Your job is to ensure that he knows there is a strong body of opposition building up to this measure. If you cannot persuade him to oppose White, then at least make sure he is neutralised, and does not vote next time round■

Liz Warren

This list records the names of those who voted against us on February 7.
Is your MP's name on it?
If so, you have no time to waste.
Those who are known to be Roman Catholics are marked as such.
Even if he or she did not vote against us, they still need to be contacted.

The following voted for the Second Reading of James White's Bill:

Abse, Leo
Altken, Jonathan
Anderson, Donald
Armstrong, Ernest
Atkins, Rt Hon H. (Spelthorne)
Atkins, Ronald (Preston N)
Bain, Mrs Margaret
Banks, Robert
Barnett, Rt Hon Joel
Beith, A. J.
Benyon, W.
Boardman, H.
Bowden, A. (Brighton, Kemptown)
Boyson, Dr Rhodes (Brent)
Bradford, Rev Robert
Braine, Sir Bernard
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brittan, Leon
Broughton, Sir Alfred
Buchanan, Richard **RC**
Buck, Antony
Burden, F. A.
Callaghan, Jim (Middleton & P)
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis **RC**
Carr, Rt Hon Robert
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Paul
Churchill, W. S.
Clemitson, Ivor
Cocks, Michael (Bristol S)
Cohen, Stanley **RC**
Coleman, Donald
Cordle, John H.
Cormack, Patrick
Costain, A. P.
Cox, Thomas (Tooting) **RC**
Craigen, J. M. (Maryhill)
Dalyell, Tam
Delergy. Hugh **RC**
Dempsey, James **RC**
Doig, Peter
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duffy, A. E. P. **RC**
Dunn, James A. **RC**
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh **RC**
Eadie, Alex
Elliott, Sir William
English, Michael
Evans John (Newton)
Ewing, Harry (Stirling)
Eyre, Reginald
Fitch, Alan (Wigan)
Fletcher- Cooke, Charles
Fowler, Norman (Sutton C'f'd)
Fraser, Rt Hon H. (Stafford & St) **RC**
Fry, Peter
Galbraith, Hon. T. G. D.
Gardner, Edward (S Fylde)
Goodhew, Victor
Gorst, John
Gray, Hamish
Grieve, Percy
Grocott, Bruce
Hamilton, James (Bothwell) **RC**
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Walter (Wakefield)
Harvie Anderson, Rt Hon Miss
Hatterley, Rt Hon Roy
Hatton, Frank
Hayhoe, Barney **RC**
Holland, Philip
Horam, John
Hughes, Mark (Durham)
Hughes, Roy (Newport)
Hunter, Adam
Irvine, Rt Hon Sir A. (Edge Hill)
Irving, Rt Hon S. (Dartford)
Jackson, Colin (Brighouse)
James, David **RC**
Jessel, Toby
Johnson, James (Hull West)
Johnson Smith, G. (E Grinstead)
Jones, Dan (Burnley)
Kershaw, Anthony
King, Tom (Bridgwater)
Kitson, Sir Timothy **RC**
Lamond, James
Lawrence, Ivan
Leadbitter, Ted
Le Marchant, Spencer
Lester, Jim (Beeston)
Lloyd, Ian
Loyden, Eddie
Mabon, Dr J. Dickson
McAdden, Sir Stephen
MacCormick, Iain **RC**
McElhone, Frank **RC**
Macfarlane, Neil
McGuire Michael (Ince) **RC**
Mackenzie, Gregor
McMillan, Tom (Glasgow C)
McNair-Wilson, M. (Newbury)
McNamara, Kevin **RC**
Maguire, Frank (Fermanagh) **RC**
Mahon, Simon **RC**
Marks, Kenneth
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Mather, Carol
Maude, Angus
Mellish, Rt Hon Robert **RC**
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Millan, Bruce
Miller, Hal (Bromsgrove)
Miller, Dr M. S. (E Kilbridge)
Monro, Hector
Morgan-Giles, Rear-Admiral
Morris, Charles R. (Openshaw)
Morrison, Chales (Devizes)
Morrison, Peter (Chester)
Neubert, Michael
Noble, Mike
Normanton, Tom
Oakes Gordon
O'Halloran, Michael **RC**
Onslow, Cranley
Padley, Walter
Page, John (Harrow West)
Page, Rt Hon R. Graham (Crosby)
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parkinson, Cecil
Parry, Robert **RC**
Pattie, Geoffrey
Peart, Rt Hon Fred
Pendry, Tom **RC**
Percival, Ian
Price, David (Eastleigh) **RC**
Price, William (Rugby)
Rawlinson, Rt Hon Sir Peter **RC**
Reid, George
Renton, Rt Hon Sir D. (Hunts)
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridsdale, Jullan
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Michael (Cardiff NW)
Robertson, John (Paisley)
Rodgers, George (Chorley)
Rodgers, Sir John (Sevenoaks)
Rose, Paul B.
Ross, Stephen (Isle of Wight)
Ross, William (Londonderry)
Rossi, Hugh (Hornsey) **RC**
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
St. John-Stevas, Norman **RC**
Sandelson, Neville
Shelton, William (Streatham)
Shersby, Michael
Sillars, James
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Small, William
Smith, Cyril (Rochdale)
Smith, Dudley (Warwick)
Smith, John (N Lanarkshire)
Speed, Keith
Spriggs, Leslie
Stainton, Keith
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony (Wavertree)
Stewart, Donald (Western Iles)
Stoddart, David
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Teddy (Cathcart)
Tebbit, Norman
Thomas, Rt Hon P. (Hendon S)
Thompson, George **RC**
Tinn, James
Townsend, Cyril D.
Urwin, T. W.
Vaughan, Dr Gerard
Wainwright, Edwin (Dearne V)
Wainwright, Richard (Colne V)
Walder, David (Clitheroe)
Walker, Terry (Kingswood)
Walters, Dennis **RC**
Warren, Kenneth
Watkins, David
Weatherill, Bernard
Welsh, Andrew
White, Frank P. (Bury)
White, James (Pollok)
Willey, Rt Hon Frederick
Wilson, Alexander (Hamilton)
Wilson, Gordon (Dundee E)
Winterton, Nicholas
Woodall, Alec
Woof, Robert
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David (Bolton E)

Tellers for the Ayes.
Mr. Anthony Fell **RC**
Mr. Biggs Davison **RC**



MARCH 8 WOMEN MEET IN GLASGOW NEWCASTLE MANCHESTER BIRMINGHAM BRISTOL CARDIFF ...AND LONDON

The National Assembly of Women celebrated International Women's Day, March 8, with an evening meeting in London. The programme included two speakers, Joyce Mutasa and Sheila Rowbotham, and the Women's Theatre Group. Here two NAW members outline the Assembly's history and plans for the future.

About forty women were invited to attend a meeting held by the National Assembly of Women last December to discuss the organisation's past role, present activities and future. They constituted a cross section of all those who had been active in the Assembly from 1952 when it started to the present day.

Though small, the NAW has played a significant historical role since the end of the war, campaigning for social and economic priorities within the social structure, always in the interests of women.

The work of the NAW is based on the three points of its Charter, drawn up in 1952. It refers to women's status as citizens, workers and mothers, stressing the necessity for equality in all spheres, particularly equal pay.

The afternoon session of the December meeting was devoted to suggestions for amendments, and emphasis shifted away from the narrow concept of women as mothers towards a woman's right to choose and the changing of traditional concepts of male and female. However, the new Charter is in the embryonic stage, with a lot of work and discussion still to be done on it.

Those of us who had been in the NAW for the last nine months had asked for this meeting to clarify in our own minds a) exactly what the NAW was, and b) what was its present relationship to the women's movement.

The NAW had its origins in the International Women's Committee, a body which was founded during World War 2 for the purpose of celebrating International Women's Day, but which obviously came to have much wider functions and a considerable appeal for women: a "Women's Parliament" was held in war time London, attended by 2000 women from all over the country.

Nan McMillan, NAW member: "We were fighting for better conditions in the factories, for nurseries and an end to the marriage bar (married women were excluded from certain professions). The struggle arose out of tremendous problems."

These problems continued after the war: nurseries opened when women were needed in the factories and were then closed down. This proved to be a campaign around which many women could fight. Women also took part in the fight against German rearmament in co-operation with progressive German women, a delegation from whom lobbied Parliament with their British sisters.

By 1952 the IWD celebration catered for a delegate assembly – anyone who could collect twelve signatures of women involved in the various campaigns could come as a delegate. 1500 women came and these delegates thus represented small groups of women who met informally to work on issues which affected their lives. There were 80 in London alone.

"How did you start the groups? Did they always arise spontaneously?"

"Not always. Sometimes groups were formed with the definite purpose of fighting an issue. It was a matter of how deeply we thought about the issues."

"I was invited to a neighbour's house."

"The groups worked on different things according to their locality."

We were struck by the similarity between the small groups and those of the Women's Liberation Movement which exist now.

By 1954 annual assemblies were held in London, Manchester, Glasgow and Surrey. The title, NAW, had been adopted by popular demand in 1952. Successful campaigns of the Assembly publicised natural childbirth methods, got cervical smear tests instituted in welfare clinics, drew attention to the dangers presented by horror comics and war toys, and concentrated very heavily on peace, disarmament, and the dangers of nuclear weapons. Much of the Assembly's membership identified with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and in addition to this dozens of women's peace groups sprang up spontaneously all over the country. The Assembly was instrumental in coordinating some of this work.

Between then and now the NAW has concentrated on national campaigns and its international relationships. Quite early on it affiliated to the Women's International Democratic Federation, an organisation which maintains friendly cooperation with women's organisations the world over. The most successful campaign at home was a nationwide nursery campaign by which the government was finally persuaded to provide more money and channels through which a more liberal policy on nurseries could be effected. This is due to be implemented by 1980.

Activities this year have included delegations to the GDR and Hungary. A concert with guitarist John Williams raised £500 for a hospital in Vietnam, an outstandingly successful meeting on Chile was held to draw attention to the plight of women being tortured by the fascist regime. There was a very distressing eyewitness account of the condition of women in Chile since the coup, and Joan Jara, widow of murdered folk singer Victor Jara, described the process of the workers' movement in Chile and its destruction by the junta.

Since the autumn the NAW have contributed criticism and amendments to the Home Office on the White Paper for women's equality and have held a series of WEA classes on "Landmarks in the development of women's consciousness in 20th century Britain" with Susan Sharpe as tutor. This followed a very successful women's study course on "The suffragettes and their times" last year.

Since the New Year fund raising activities have received priority because funds are always low and a talk by authoress Jessica Mitford, on various aspects of her life, featured among these.

Our plans for 1975, International Women's Year, included the meeting on March 8 A seminar will be held in May, entitled "Can we mitigate and abolish discrimination against women?" There will be representatives coming from most European countries.

The NAW has acquired some new activists over the past year and we feel it could play an important role in the women's movement. In Britain it is the only progressive women's organisation with international links and it offers an established structure and years of campaigning experience.

If you are interested, copies of the Charter, our campaign document, and our newsletter can be obtained from the NAW, 283 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

Yvonne Reynolds ***Jane Noble***

Working Women's Charter Campaign Conference for the London region will take place on May 17 and 18 at City University. All organisations and groups using the Charter as a basis for discussion and activity are invited. Creche provided. Return date for credentials is April 19. Please write: Secretary, Co-ordinating Committee, London WWCC, 49 Lowther Hill, London SE23 1P2.

4,000 people marched through London's East End on Saturday March 8, International Women's Day. From Whitechapel to Victoria Park in Hackney, women sang in the rain, while several groups of women waved from high-rise balconies.

NEWS



Ann Smith

ANGELA DAVIS: Sisters and Brothers

Dear Spare Rib,
I must commend you on the thouroughness with which you reported in your issue No.32 the visit of Sister Angela Davis. Not being able to get tickets to see her, I was glad to get a full account of many of the interviews with her.

She is as a woman the epitome of what you stand for, and what you are trying to communicate to your readers. But there is something else that you have been able to accomplish at the same time, by carrying Sister Angela. That is to show to many Black people in the United Kingdom the figure and character of a great person, who is fighting on many fronts, not least of which is the emancipation of Black and Oppressed people world wide.
Lawrence Scott
'Seise the Time'
London N8

HOMEWORKERS CAMPAIGN: Against Isolation

Early in February the Low Pay Unit in London held a meeting to discuss ways and means of improving the situation of homeworkers by mobilising the government, the Trade Unions and public support for change. As well as representatives from the TUC and Trade Unions, Ruskin College and the Women's Movement, there were four homeworkers to give the discussions a practical base. It was generally agreed that more digging out of the numbers and conditions of work of the homeworker, which varied from region to region and from trade to trade, still had to be done.

Everyone felt that it was vital to involve the trade unions in the homeworkers' struggle even though their isolated position of working alone made it difficult to contact them. There is no doubt that if the indoor workers, i.e. those in the factories, were widely unionised it would be easier to reach out to cover the homeworkers. One suggestion was that under the proposed Employment Protection Bill the Trade Unions should press for a contract of employment for each homeworker; and that homeworkers should be included in collective bargaining agreements. More immediately helpful was the idea that the Standard Minimum Rate (SMR) of pay, which should *now include overhead charges,* should be better publicised and copies handed out to each homeworker; and that some way should be found of involving homeworkers in the decisions of the appropriate Wages Council, if they could be reimbursed for the working time lost.

On the government side it was felt that more could be done to monitor the working situation of homeworkers as revealed in the various studies done by the Commission on Industrial Relations in the last two years. And more importantly government departments could immediately use the existing legislation to oversee conditions of work. For example, the Wages Council inspectors should be increased in number and give more time to checking the pay and conditions of homeworkers, and be encouraged to be more active in penalising employers who pay below the SMR. Secondly, the government should make sure that the lists of homeworkers, which by law should be lodged with each Local Authority, are up-to-date, comprehensive, and open to inspection by homeworkers, the Trade Unions and other interested bodies instead of being semi-secret as at present.

Apart from the practical points of action the meeting remained acutely aware of the problems of bringing homeworkers into contact with one another. The four homeworkers attending said how comforted they were to find others in the same work boat, and that there was now the hope of public support for changing their conditions of work. They needed a wider choice of work, support in negotiating better conditions and pay, and less isolation. One possibility might be local work centres with crèches and other ancillary help. Another could be a Homeworkers' Charter which could standardise pay, overheads, conditions of work, and provide efficient checks to insure that these were being obeyed. The next step now is to raise some funds to get the campaign under way■

For those who would like to read more about Homeworkers:

Sweated Labour, 1974. 50p. By the Low Pay Unit, 9 Poland St., London W1V 3DG.

Homeworkers in North London, 1974. 50p. A Study by the N7 Women's Liberation Group, c/o Ann de Winter, 4 Roden St., London N7.

Mary Kennedy

NUS: Nurses

Health students in all areas started to work together in 1972 to try to break down differences in their status. The National Union of Students wants health students to organise as a group. It thinks student nurses should be recognised as students and have proper educational facilities.

So student nurses can now be full members of the NUS. They can affiliate individually for £2.75 each, or form a student union in their teaching hospital and affiliate for £1.25 each (at least ten student nurses are necessary to form a student union).

They will receive insurance cover while at work to a maximum of £50,000. This insurance scheme means that the NUS can compete with the Royal College of Nursing on its own terms, as well as being a much more radical, campaigning union.

The NUS can of course only campaign for the student nurses as students. The trade unions, on the other hand, want student nurses to be recognised as wage workers. They are paid a wage, not a grant. NUS has no negotiating rights or representation on the Whitley Council, where the trade unions and employers (DHSS, and Area and Regional Health Authorities) negotiate wages and conditions.

NUS says it has no ambition to get onto the Whitley Council. It sees its role as co-operation with NUPE and COHSE, not competition. But there are problems. For example, what form of exploitation is specifically 'student' in the case of the student nurse? Will student nurses be prepared to join both NUPE or COHSE *and* the NUS? If not, NUS might find itself taking members from the trade unions, rather than from the Royal College of Nursing■

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BPAS

MIDDLESEX POLY CRECHE CLOSED: 'Callous Mothers'?

An interesting thing has happened at the Middlesex Poly in Hendon. Last October fifty women, many with young children, enrolled for an experimental course, "Contemporary Images of Women". This was arranged by Humanities Lecturer Stella Rosenak who, aware of the isolation of women with young children, persuaded the department to provide a creche.

Lectures covered such topics as Women's Role in the Family, Women at Work, and Women in Literature. As well as lectures by Polytechnic staff there were also outside speakers. Muriel Turner, Assistant Secretary of ASTMS, spoke about women in trade unions; Audrey Wise MP discussed problems confronting women in politics; Beatrix Campbell, a journalist, and Jean McCrindle, members of Women's Liberation, spoke about Women and Sexuality.

In spite of the unheated hall with chairs set out rigidly as for school assembly, support for the course was excellent. It seemed as if a real breakthrough had been made at last by the Polytechnic opening its doors to the community and recognising the need for women to involve themselves outside the home.

The first blow came when Barnet Social Services Department tried to close down the creche. Ms Candy, a social worker, informed the mothers that they were causing their children to suffer maternal deprivation. She called them "cruel and callous", and as Stella Rosenak put it: "If a child cried this was meant to be proof of deprivation and if it didn't then the mother was told the child was withdrawn!"

As a result of Ms Candy's repeated attacks some of the mothers left the course. Others, however, refused to be intimidated and took over the running of the creche themselves, with the help of the Students Union and one of the college secretaries, Edna Fuller. Ms Candy disappeared.

Such a feeling of sisterhood had been established that the women thought it was vital to remain together. An extension was agreed by the Dean but she withdrew creche facilities. Undeterred the women arrived the following term with their children, took over the boardroom and organised their own creche. As a result of this action the Dean interrupted the lecture and threatened that unless the children were removed immediately the course would be closed. An attempt to discuss the issue with her failed and she was asked to leave.

After a gruelling session with one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, the Dean and various members of the Poly, it was then agreed that the course and creche could continue until the end of term, providing we arranged the course and creche ourselves. However, the women left this meeting feeling that the Poly authorities did not take the women, the course, or its implications seriously.

The challenge was taken up. Seeing Red theatre group performed their play on women's roles in the home and at work. (A collection was taken to cover the expenses of this theatre group.) Lulu Brown spoke on the politics of housework; a talk on Women and Population was given by Mary Tranter; a discussion on Maternal Deprivation was opened by Ruth Stern. These three women are members of the course.

Success after all, you might think, but at what cost? What is behind it all? Why have the Poly authorities shown such violent opposition to a group of women who want courses, not on Mother Care and Household Management, but on subjects that are relevant to them as women in a political context? ■ ***Ruth Stern***

Since writing this article the women have heard that the course arranged for next term is threatened with closure. So the fight is on again.

All women interested in supporting and attending the course should contact the Course Director, Stella Rosenak on 202 6545 ext. 130.

BATTEREB WIVES: MATRIMONIAL HOMES BILL

On January 14 1975 Jack Ashley MP introduced the following Bill: Battered Wives (Rights to Possession of Matrimonial Home). "That leave be given to bring in a bill to require the courts to make an order giving the wife of a man who has been convicted of an act of violence against her the complete right to possession of the matrimonial home if she applies for such an order and for purposes connected therewith."

The Bill passed its first reading and will be given a second reading on July 11 of this year.

Whilst welcoming any further legislation which will help battered women, there are certain difficulties in enacting such legislation. Amazing as it is to have Parliamentary awareness that battered women exist, certain recent cases suggest that what is wrong with the law at present is not its 'on paper' protection but protection in reality.

A woman can get an injunction ordering a husband out of the home. But if he comes round intent on causing trouble she can't get any help from the police provided he doesn't actually hit her in front of them. This is because an injunction is a civil order and at present it is not a crime in police sense to disobey a civil order. Only the bailiffs can enforce it - and they don't work weekends!

Jack Ashley has now offered to discuss possible changes in the bill, before its second reading■



John Sturrock (Report)

LANCASHIRE: Textile Workers Protest

Five hundred textile workers - many of them women - came to Ince in Lancashire early in March to protest at the closure of Courtaulds' Empress Mill, Wigan. 350 jobs have been lost and there have been mass sackings and lay-offs throughout Courtaulds.

Stan Thorne, Labour MP for Preston, pointed out that Courtaulds was a multi-national company which exploited workers all over the world.

One woman carried a placard which read "Out of the gloom a voice said unto me: 'Smile and be happy, things could be worse'. So I smiled and was happy - and behold things *did* get worse!"

CHILDCARE: "Anger and frustration forced us finally into collective action"



In May this year the first national nursery conference will be held in Nottingham as part of a national campaign launched last October.

Here Margaret Purdey describes how that campaign began. "Together with other women in my local group, I had tried a variety of facilities for my two pre-school children, but the conclusions were inescapable. Only a flexible, state-financed, community-controlled nursery system could both solve the immediate practical problems and allow all of us to develop independently as people. The conclusions were shared by the other women.

Anger and frustration at our individual helplessness forced us finally into collective action. By using the Movement's demand for 24 hour state-financed nurseries, we hoped to bring the question of childcare back into the forefront of debate within the Women's Movement, and to provide a basis for a united campaign with other interested organisations. At an NCCL conference in June we volunteered to organise a conference solely concerned with childcare, to be held in the autumn.

Women who planned to come repeatedly asked for it to be about *action*, and we were forcefully reminded that the theoretical debate is for most women secondary to the sheer practical problem. We decided to concentrate on the why and how of setting up a national nursery campaign.

We were convinced it had to be a national campaign. Childcare facilities administered at local government level are ultimately determined by national policy, and a broad-based national movement, able to articulate demands, to act as an educational forum, and, most importantly, to mobilise support for individual or local effort, seemed the most effective way of tackling the problem.

At the conference itself this feeling was echoed by many women, most of whom had been working around the issue of childcare for years. All agreed on the need for united effort to extend their effectiveness.

Discussion in the morning workshops underlined the need for concrete ideas for action:

A workshop on childminding recognised it as a circle of exploitation within the larger circle - women trapped at home with small children take to childminding. They 'plug' holes in the state services, at no cost to the state, only to themselves. It was felt that childminding as we know it would eventually cease to exist; it would become integrated into a state-financed system with professional status, wage and training. The local authority courses for childminders were a start. We should press for more.

The workshop on factory nurseries saw as the advantages their closeness to the workplace and so the opportunity to see the child during the day. The overriding disadvantage was the employers' control of standards, policy and the labour force.

Nursery centres were seen as the best possible development. They provide a range of services, all in one place and under one Government department. We should press for these in all new developments - slum clearances, new towns etc.

A session on playgroups thought they should be under parental control now, with the ultimate aim of community control. This seems impossible now - people don't have the time, the commitment, the sense of common purpose and responsibility - but it is the ideal. In the meantime there must be an educational side to the childcare campaign. We should generate discussion of common responsibility for children, and of the possibility of socialised care facilities of all kinds.

In the afternoon plenary session the conference voted unanimously for the establishment of such a campaign. A group volunteered to organise the first national conference in the spring, and to produce a newsletter."

Since then women from the Nottingham group have prepared a campaign tactics paper for use as a basis for discussion. They have been very active themselves along the lines they suggest in that paper.

They contacted Local Authorities, writing to both Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire to ask for information about plans for day nurseries (run by the Social Services) and nursery schools (run by the Education Commission) up to 1981.

Nottingham sent information, but was very brief. From Derbyshire came a good response, with details of questionnaires they'd done, and a real interest in the query. The group intends to concentrate on the Social Services, as day nurseries are used by a wider group, not being tied to school hours and holidays.

They wrote to the Arts Council about the possibility of a creche at Nottingham Arts Centre; also to the Community Arts Panel - neither has yet replied. However, the Midland Group is moving into new premises in October, and as one of the women in the group is pregnant, the question of a creche has occurred. Margaret Purdey is writing a paper to suggest plans to them, and they have compiled a list of local arts centres throughout the country, all of which could be asked to provide creches. The same goes for libraries, cinemas, the lot - it would do something to break down the elitism of the art world.

They wrote to the County Labour Group about expenditure on pre-school facilities in the county. Results so far: referred to Policy Committee for further investigation by a Policy Review Panel.

They are arranging a teach-in on how to reach your local councillor!

They are collaborating with the Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers. It's important locally, includes a lot of women, and had already shown interest. Together they are compiling an up to date list of facilities in the area.

They hope to set up an information stall in the Victoria Shopping Centre in Nottingham to raise the whole issue, provide information about facilities already available, and attack the guilt most women are pressured into feeling when they so much as feel fed-up with the company of their kids. There will be an area for children - one woman is designing a creative space. They'll also do a survey on who would use a nursery if one were available.

They send speakers from the group to discuss childcare with local Trade Union branches - always bringing up the nursery clause on the Working Women's Charter - and to speak on local radio.

They offer support to other groups fighting on the same or related issues. For instance, to the Childminders Action Group; to NUPE, which is supposedly concerned, though as yet inactive; and to members of the Tobacco Workers Union when, at their annual conference in Nottingham in June, they put forward a demand for maternity leave. It is vital that questions of maternity leave and childcare - of women who aren't free to go out to work if they want to - are raised in the struggle for Equal Pay, and raised not only by those women who already have children, the most tied and least able to take action■

Jill Nicholls

There will be a one day conference at the Albert Hall Institute, Nottingham, on May 10th. The Nottingham group will give the opening paper, and Audrey Wise has been invited to come and speak.

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A SELECTION FROM FRANKLIN SCHOOL'S SPRING PROGRAMME: Sexual politics, Understanding Virginia Woolf, Growth of the Alternative Society (1968-75), In Transition: A Workshop for Divorced, Separated and Widowed People, Challenges and Choices in Middle Life – Franklin School of Contemporary Studies, (Ref. G) 43 Adelaide Road, London NW3. 01-722 0562.

GROUPS

Worthing/Littlehampton Group Contact Bobbie Begg Worthing 66125

Anyone interested in forming a women's group in the Chelsea/Kensington area, please phone Clair 584 2020.

Anyone in Rickmansworth interested in forming WL Group please contact Gillian. Tel. Ric. 72288

Anyone in Norwich area interested in forming new group contact Jill Jones, 116 Magpie Road (off Magdalen St), Norwich Norfolk.

GAY/BISEXUAL WOMEN GROUP IN CENTRAL LONDON Contact Janet Clarke, Chelic Great Windmill Street, W1. 01-437 7363.

Homosexual/Bisexual Women join the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. CHE is your voice – make it louder! Meetings and socials throughout Britain. Send SAE 9 x 4 CHE(332) 28 Kennedy St, Manchester 2.

Oxford Gay Women's group. Phone Caroline 65239. All Lesbian/Bisexual women welcome

BARMOUTH AREA Women who believe in the supremacy of women contact A. Williams c/o Meriel James, 7 Maes-y-Geddi, Bala Gwynedd

Any groups in Northwest? Contact Rachel, 14 Frithwood Ave., Northwood, Middlesex

SERVICES

Woman psychotherapist (Jungian) now has vacancies Highgate area. Tel 01-347 5593

Carlotta Palfi, psychotherapist English and German. Battersea Park. Tel 01-720 1667

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Homosexual women and men can ring Icebreakers on 01-274 9590 every evening of the year between 7.30 & 10.30 to talk over their problems with other gay people.

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AFRICA I am looking for a companion to travel through Africa hitching public transport etc. Telephone 01-794 6396 Liz. After 6pm. 33B Arkwright Road NW3

Van to Paris mid-april needs paying goods or people there and back 01-858 5142

PERSONAL

Fairly confused SE London man would, like to meet some liberated women socially 01-302 3219

We are two gay women, Swiss and Swedish who would like to integrate in a commune (arts crafts agriculture gardening). We would like to visit communes working in these fields with the view of joining one. Will be travelling around Europe in a dormobile from July 1975. Please write Ursula Giger and Ingrid Claessen, 3 Av. Allinges, 1225 Chene Bourg, Switzerland

Birkenhead lesbian collective. Tuesdays 8pm Ground Floor Flat 35 Rock Park, Rock Ferry, Merseyside or ring Clare 045 744121

Obedience to Authority? writer seeks contacts with others who have experienced personal conflict with awry practices of systems: 'rank closing', abuse of power, protection of misused authority etc., as research for book. Write 47 Long Mynd Road, Northfield, Birmingham B31 1HJ in strictest confidence.

Northern gay women please communicate Box no. 332

Going to Japan in summer. would appreciate contacts womens groups or just chat if you've lived there. Sandy 01-727 8563 (eves)

ACCOMMODATION

Modernised Pied à Terre, WC1 Semi-basement. Bed sitter (Wall bed, fitted cupboards, carpets, curtains etc) Bathroom, kitchen/Pantry overlooking Plant area. Leasehold 36 years £10,750 Enquiries:- 01-278 1501

COMMUNE. Do you want to join a group of people wanting to buy 25 acre estate to establish commune to enjoy the benefits of living together as a larger social group. Phone 01-960 2667 or write Box 343

Charming Detached Georgian Cottage (2hrs London – ¼ hr Bristol/bath) Consists Porch, Plant room, Hall, Cloakroom, Sitting room, Dining room Kitchen, Cellar, 3 Bedrooms, Bathroom & small garden overlooking surrounding countryside. Wottne-under-Edge, Gloucs. £16,250. EnquiriesL- 01-278 1501

Four people seek others with/without children to find, buy outright, and share large South London house. Must have/be able to borrow £2,500 for own room/share communal space and garden. Box no. 341

Student, daughter (2) need accommodation within reach of child's nursery in Stoke Newington – up to £10 pw Ruth 01-968 8485 evs.

EVENTS

Australian Women's Films. A Festival of independent films and video from Australia includes film sby Julie Gibson, Martha Kay, Gill Armstrong and others. April 25, 26, 27 Collegiate Theatre, Gordon St WC1 (nr. Euston) Programme details/tickets (£1 for 3 days) from 15 Arundel Gardens W11 Tel 01-727 8563 (evenings)

BOOKS ETC.

SAPPHO, the only lesbian feminist magazine in Europe. 40p inc. post. BCM/PETREL, London WC1 6XX. Meetings held every Tuesday, 7.30 pm. upstairs room, The Chepstow Pub, Chepstow Place, London W2. Off Westbourne Grove. 40p admission for non-subscribers.

Feminist Books: Our anthology of British feminist writings, **'CONDITIONS ILLUSION: Papers from the Women's Movement',** will be published 16th April 75 at £1.85 The book contains a guide and directory of groups, women's centres etc. and is 416 pages long with cartoons and illustrations. Send s.a.e. for details of **pre-publication reduced price** (to be received before April 16th). Details also now available for the Feminist Literature Distribution Network, with discount terms for women's groups. Feminist Books, PO Box HP5 Leeds 6

Women's Liberation Literature or any books. Send SAE for free booklist to H. Rutovitz, 31 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh.

New Design WL Badge 14p (incl. postage). Stop Rape American pamphlet on self-defence for women (illustrated) 26p (incl postage) From Sisterhood Books c/o 22 Great Windmill St, London W1

Nuclear Testing can mean cancer, damaged babies, and war. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament fights against all nuclear weapons. Keep in touch by reading Sanity – £1 per year. CND, 14 Grays Inn Road, London WC1

Anti-Apartheid News describes what life is like in Vorster's South Africa Rhodesia, Namibia and Portugal's former African colonies, exposes British collaboration with apartheid – and involves you in the fight against it. 10 issues a year. Membership of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (which includes subscription to AA News £2 pa: subscription only 75p pa. Anti-Apartheid Movement, 89 Charlotte St., London W1. Tel 01-580 5211

WOMEN MEN KIDS who cook together? Please send favourite recipes and hints to Box no. 342. Credit Given

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THIRD WORLD: POWDERED MILK KILLS



Dumex Advert from Nigeria

"Third World Babies are dying because their mothers feed them with western style infant milk" says War on Want in its pamphlet *The Baby Killer*. "The baby food industry stands accused of promoting their products in communities which cannot use them properly, of using advertising, sales samples and free gift gimmicks that persuade mothers to give up breast feeding."

The giant multinational Nestle stood accused by members of the Baby Foods Action Group and a local London branch of the National Childbirth Trust, including a lot of small children, who picketed its British headquarters in Croydon on February 19.

Most passers-by were friendly and interested, though the placards caused some confusion. Slogans like 'Powdered Milk Kills' and 'Breast is Best' made some men dismissive ("I was brought up on Cow and Gate and look at me now") and some women defensive, perhaps because they'd used it themselves and felt guilty. The context needed to be explained - that Third World women couldn't afford the products, read the instructions or sterilise the bottles - so that the question of imperialism was raised, and not just the question of breast or bottle feeding. One woman got the message: "Feed the mothers and let them feed their own".

People going into the building were less sympathetic. Most didn't even know they worked for Nestle's, although all the companies listed in reception were Nestle's-owned.

Kathy Levine, coordinator of the Baby Foods Action Group, and Helen Dobson, representing Streatham NCT - both of whom had put their case on Radio London that morning - were received by Nestle's PR man, who insisted that the foods were pushed only for weaning, and that Nestle was in no way responsible for the deaths.

Nestle claim that poor countries need their foods for weaning. Yet the 27th World Health Assembly, on Infant Nutrition and Breast Feeding, held in May 1974, agreed that efforts should be concentrated on developing locally-produced weaning foods. The Protein Advisory Group, in its manual on feeding young children, insists that the only answer is "to find better uses for the locally available staples for the preparation of nutritious weaning foods".

"We know the sort of people who are putting forward these arguments," says Nestle, "and these people are idealists. It's very nice to say that these countries should be self-sufficient and should produce their own weaning foods and so on, but it is not a fact of life at the moment."

It could of course be possible. The multinational food companies are actively discouraging self-sufficiency.

They send powdered milk in times of natural disaster (or else the milk is bought by the state and sent as aid, thus subsidising the private sector. So a new market is created, a new need. The western powers dump their waste on the Third World and so bind it to them. Natural resources are downgraded or destroyed. The imperialised countries become dependent on imports.

It is not simply that breast milk is natural and free while bottle milk is a continuous expense. (In Nigeria, the cost of bottle feeding a 3 month old infant is approximately 30% of the minimum urban wage. By the time it is 6 months old, the cost will have risen to 47%. In Nigeria, as in most 'developing' countries, the minimum wage is what the majority earn. Cow and Gate products are sold throughout Nigeria.)

Human milk protects the child against disease. It acts as a natural contraceptive: in many traditional cultures a woman would not sleep with her husband until she had weaned her child completely. If she was breastfeeding for 2 or 3 years, this would have an obvious effect on child spacing. There may also be a direct physiological effect. It has been observed that women who let their children breastfeed without restriction do not menstruate for up to 2 years.

The Third World can import Western products but not the whole Western way of life. Dr James Farquhar, consultant physician at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, who has travelled and worked in Africa, Asia and South America, put it like this: "It is clear to all but those who will not see that informed, adequate and relatively safe bottle feeding must *follow,* or at least accompany, but *never precede* literacy, education, infection-free water supplies, sanitation and a standard of living which permits the purchase of enough baby foods, equipment, and the means of sterilisation".

Women dilute what milk they can buy. Babies die of diarrhoeal diseases, and marasmus - what has been called "commerciogenic malnutrition" or "the Lactogen syndrome".

The companies deny that their advertising practice in the Third World is unethical. Yet they rely heavily on medical mystique, dressing up saleswomen in nurses' uniforms, and paying qualified nurses on a sales-related basis that belies their supposedly educational role. Clinic cards may have a picture of a tin of Lactogen in one corner; posters in the clinics may carry the Nestle logo - all 'free gifts' from the companies to the impoverished health services.

The companies' claim that it is up to the 'host' countries to act against them if they object should be seen in this context. The multinationals have immense wealth and power in the Third World. Any government with an economy dependent on cocoa, coffee, tea, or sugar is in no position to dictate terms to Nestle, or to Wyeth, whose parent company is one of the USA's biggest food corporations. The multinationals' resources are far greater than those of the developing countries. Nestle's annual turnover (8% of it in baby foods, 25% in other milk products) exceeds the Gross National Product of Kenya by nearly £500 million.

Sweden is a much richer country than Kenya. Its government reached this agreement with the baby food industry: "Advertisements for breast milk substitutes should in no form be aimed directly toward the public or to individual families. Special discount offers directed to the consumer should not be made with regard to products of this type".

It is clear why no such agreement has been reached with Kenya, where the consequences of the abuse of artificial feeding are so much worse.

Jill Nicholls

Counter Information Services are doing further research into Nestle. *The New Internationalist* - which first raised the issue early in 1974 - is planning another feature on baby-foods.

War on Want is publishing a new edition of *The Baby Killer* in March. It will include a technical appendix giving supporting evidence, responses to the first edition and more about breastfeeding in Britain. Price 40p plus 5p postage from War on Want, 467 Caledonian Rd, London N79BE. Much of the information in this article is taken from *The Baby Killer.*

The Baby Foods Action Group wants to force Nestle and the other companies to go along with the World Health Assembly's recommendations (to encourage breastfeeding, stop irresponsible advertising and develop local weaning foods). "The way for us to make sure they change is by acting, protesting and demonstrating, directly to the companies, and through the British government, newspapers, meetings and any activities which will bring the issue to the public eye." Contact Baby Foods Action Group, The Basement, 103 Gower St, London WC1.

librarians for social change

I read with special interest the article on the Men against Sexism conference in *Spare Rib* 32, *writes Borin van Loon.* This appeared just before the first-ever Librarians for Social Change conference took place at the School of Librarianship, Polytechnic of North London on February 8 and 9. The ad hoc "collective" getting the conference together were keyed up as the conference approached, and some members felt even more apprehensive after reading the report by Bernard and David.

Because LfSC is a very young movement in terms of collective action, our approach to the conference idea had been somewhat naive; we had little previous experience of such events to draw upon. In fact, after long deliberation we aimed for a self-managed gathering which sounded horribly akin to that so criticised in *Spare Rib* 32.

Perhaps the anti-organised approach worked as well as it did for LfSC for the same reasons that it seemed to work at the first MAS meeting: in particular, because the movement was in the exploratory stage of finding out what its aims should be. The fluid situation of largely unprepared workshops did not alienate very many people and seemed well-suited to the wide-ranging areas under discussion. Perhaps *next* time, taking the example of MAS, we will need greater direction and achieve more defined areas.

Inevitably on the day our plans did not run exactly as we had envisaged. Over 100 men and women turned up on the Saturday (at one desperate point we had visions of only a handful), mostly library people, despite visionary ideas of involving community groups, non-library users and non-librarians.

At this point many may be wondering what interest a librarians' conference might be to feminists. In fact the conference involved many issues relating to sexual politics, if only for the fact that librarianship is notorious for its elitist approach towards women workers. It is predicted that there will be a certain percentage of staff turnover each year due to women either getting married and "settling down" or because they will leave work for a prolonged period to raise offspring.

Because of this, women have largely been regarded as clerical or "library assistant"-type fodder for the library machines. The most women in the past have had to look forward to in a library career has been the position of ageing, dedicated, spinster librarian stereotype. This is probably why the LfSC Feminist group is one of the most active and popular groups, already with a complete issue of the journal under its collective belt (number 5) which managed to destroy the Smirnoff ad's "mainstay of the public library" myth on its front cover, plus the prospect of a second feminist-edited issue to come (probably number 9).

One solid achievement to come out of the group on sexual politics was the recognition of the need for a list of sources on the class struggle, oppressed groups and minority interests. A means for compilation and distribution was arranged (the contact address for this can be found at the end of this article). The prime function of such a list would be to provide pointers to selection aids for librarians who want to purchase material on, say, gay liberation for their libraries and avoid the many books which are now accepted as misleading.

A discussion on childrens' books revolved around the ignorance of librarians about the contents of the material they handle. Ideas were thrown up on ways in which those who select and promote childrens' books might be made more aware of the impact of their selections on attitudes to sex and race, for example. There is a clear distinction between a positive selection policy and a passive, random approach. This theme carried over to a letter reprinted in the conference issue of "Librarians for Social Change" (produced entirely at the conference). The letter was sent out at the beginning of December, 1974 to senior childrens' librarians in the London area by the groups listed at the end of the letter:

Dear –

We, the undermentioned groups, have been looking at children's books for some time, and in particular at their content. Working separately we have all come to the same conclusion, that most available children's books, many of which are rightly considered good books, fall down when it comes to the portrayal of sex roles, and cultural and racial minorities. This is in addition to their now widely recognised middle-class bias. We feel that a concerted effort is now required to encourage a) wider distribution of already available books that do not contain sexist and racist stereotypes, and b) the writing of books that attempt to give a more realistic portrayal of modern society, i.e. a multi-racial community in which women, men and children are accurately portrayed.

The questions on racism raised in "Books for Children: the Homelands of Immigrants in Britain", edited by Janet Hill, have not yet been paralleled by similar works from librarians on sexist and class bias in children's books. In fact, a great deal more work is required by all of us, readers, writers, publishers and librarians, to combat sexist, racist and class bias in our children's books.

We are writing to you now to solicit your support for new initiatives in this direction. Could we perhaps recommend that Children's Librarians base their selection of books on criteria that take into account these points?

At a recent London meeting we decided to co-ordinate our work in approaching librarians and publishers. We would therefore welcome an opportunity to discuss these points further with you and your colleagues. As a first step we are sending this letter to the Senior Children's Librarians of all the London Boroughs and hope that you, either separately or together, will want to pursue this matter further with us.

(Signed by): Children's Rights Workshop (Book Project), CISSY, Children's Books Study Group, Leeds Women's Liberation Literature Collective, Women's Education Collective, Education Collective Kids' Book Group, Librarians for Social Change Children's Group, Spare Rib magazine.

A similar letter was sent to the Children's Books Editors of the major publishing houses from whom most of the letters in reply have come. Most of these were positive and sympathetic to the issues raised – but do their books show this?

Borin van Loon

The List of Sources for sexual politics, racial action and class structure is being co-ordinated by Anne Peters, 681 High Road, Tottenham, N.17. Librarians for Social Change Conference issue (No 8) and back issues are available from John Noyce, Flat 2, 83 Montpelier Road, Brighton, Sussex, at 30 pence each.

HOT & COOL SEX: Cultures in Conflict
by Anna and Robert Francoeur

Changing patterns of sex and marriage are examined in the light of birth control, women's liberation and equal opportunity – how men and women now relate to one another as sexual persons. The Francoeurs analyse the shift from the constraint and artificiality of "hot" sex to the spontaneous enjoyment of "cool" sex, thereby replacing the traditional "closed" marriage with the flexible "open" marriage.

Available from bookshops or by return from
HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH Ltd
24–28 Oval Road, London N.W.1. **Price £1.95**

NEWS

SELL OUT



Welcome to the London Hilton!

I had the pleasure in preparing a room for your arrival.
Should you wish for additional room supplies or maid service,
please telephone "Housekeeping: No. 2"
Furthermore, I hope you will kindly accept my apologies
for not being able to speak much English,
as I have only recently come to this country.

Thank you

Your Chambermaid



Ruskin College History Workshop: Britain between the Wars, 1920-40 includes a proportion of papers which will be of particular interest to women. Ruskin College, Oxford, 2pm May 2 - 7pm May 4.

Michelene Wandor, Theories of Literature in the Thirties

Sally Alexander, Working Women in London

Derek Thompson, Courtship and Marriage in Preston

Ruth Hapgood, Courtship and Marriage in Abingdon

Diana Gittins, Married Life and Birth Control between the Wars

Pam Taylor, Domestic Servants

Phyllis Willmot, Growing Up in Lewisham

Sheila Rowbotham, Feminism and Sexual Liberation

Tickets for the weekend are £2, unsupported mothers 50p, and are available from Sid Willis and Sarah Bennett, 49 Elder Ave., London N8. No tickets on the door. Only 500 are available.

Reaching Thousands of Women: Bristol Abortion and Contraception Campaign

Betty Underwood writes:

"When we were making the television programme for Harlech we contacted Angela Phillips (through you, I think), and she very kindly sent us some stills of women counter-demonstrating against SPUC during the White Flower Rally on April 28 last year.

We were able to use two of these photographs in our television programme. It was very good, because it helped to increase the visual impact of the programme.

Unfortunately, I forgot to mention this is my article in SR 33 and we would like something to go in as an acknowledgement of *Spare Rib* and Angela's help over this."

Info..Odds & Sods..Advice

Self Defense

We read with great interest your article on self defence a few months ago. As a result of this we have formed our own local group, meeting in a disused box factory which we are renovating for use for classes.

We want to contact a woman who would like to teach us. Would anyone interested in teaching or learning write to us at:
11 Ivydere Road,
London E.8. (Hackney)
and we can arrange a meeting.
Claire, Georgine, Jo, Sarah, Lucy, Holly, Jane, Abbey etc.

Electromagnetic Birth Control

While reading "The Secret Life Of Plants", by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird (published by Allen Lane) I came across this most interesting passage: (p 176)

"Dr Louis Langham an obstetrician and gynaecologist who worked with Burr's technique, found for example that the precise moment of a woman's ovulation can be measured with great accuracy and that some women ovulate over the entire menstrual cycle, in some cases without menstruation. Though the detection procedure is extremely simple and in no way counters the rhythm method . . . it has yet to filter down to millions of women who would like to learn better how or how not to have children"

Burr is Harold Saxton Burr, a Yale professor who has studied the electromagnetic forces given off by living things with a voltmeter. More than this was not given in the book, nor any information on Dr Louis Langham. However in view of the interest there would be in any reasonable method of birth control for those of us who feel that eating a healthy diet and then taking the pill don't go together, can you do any research to find out more about it?
Yours,
Lyn Meyer,
Doonour,
Glenlough
Bantry, Co. Cork, Ireland.

There is a more detailed discussion of Harold Burr's work in another book published recently called *Supernature* by Lyall Watson. It describes his experiments to determine the electromagnetic forces or life fields produced by human beings, and states that he found "that each person showed a small daily fluctuation, but that all female subjects produced one huge increase in voltage, lasting about twenty four hours, one each month." He went on to prove that there was a dramatic change in voltage at the exact moment of ovulation; "this discovery of an electrical method of detecting ovulation, which is so simple that the subject just has to dangle her fingers in bowls of water, has been put forward as a system of birth control"

To our knowledge this system has not been practised in this country, and it is not part of our work at *Spare Rib* to do this kind of research. However, if there are any readers who know anything more about it, or who would be prepared to do some work on this subject, please let us know. (*Supernature* is a Coronet paperback).

Rape Centres

Here in Derby we are hoping to provide a helpful service for the victims of rape. We have personal experiences to refer to and much loving support to give – alas we have no factual knowledge of how to face the legal system in such circumstances.

If anyone has successfully set up such a centre and can send us advice and/or information on the legal aspects of rape, we will be very pleased to hear from you.
Yours sincerely,
Hilary Davison,
(On behalf of the Derby Women's group)
51 Wallbrook Road,
Derby.

As yet we know of no centres for rape victims, but recently a study group of about 40 women was set up in London. Within this group there are two sub-groups: one which is investigating the legal aspects of rape and another researching the medical side. The latter can provide questionnaires for professionals who have to deal with rape victims and also for rape victims themselves. To obtain them please write to 26 Talfourd Road, London SE 15.

The group emphasises that it is not a centre for rape victims but rather a research project that will eventually be of immense help to individuals and to women who intend to set up centres. You can contact them c/o 38 Earlham Street, London WC2.

See also *Spare Rib* 20, Angela Philips' article on the legal aspects, and Judy Gilley's article in *New Society* June 27, 1974.

Friend

My husband has recently walked out on me and I am moving into a new house in Beckenham Kent in about a month. I am looking for a woman with one child to come and live with me rent free in return for helping me out in some ways.

I have a sixteen month old son who has to be taken to and picked up by a childminder during the week, either by car or by public transport if she can't drive. He would also have to be fed and dressed.

As I work full time I need someone to do the shopping and most of the cleaning (just basic necessities). I know this sounds rather a lot, but I am willing to be flexible and I can lend my car and take my share of baby sitting.

Although what I really want is to find someone I can live with and who can live with me in harmony and where we can both be happy. Please phone me at 01-486 3271. (Office)
Moira Gray,
41 The Fairway,
Bromley,
Kent.

Semen Allergy

* Dear Holly of SW11,
Could you write to us again enclosing your address, as several readers have written in with the same complaint and would like to contact you.

Natural Childbirth

I've been trying to get some information on courses in midwifery and natural childbirth, but without much success.

My interest is in getting away from hospital childbirth and all it entails i.e. unnecessary inducements, etc., and in a movement back towards natural childbirth at home.

If you know of anyone already doing this, please let me know, and if possible print my letter so that anyone who is already practising in this way as a midwife can contact me.
Chris Mather
14 Hillrise Road
Hornsey Rise
London N19

* In order to practise legal home deliveries you have to take an SRN course, which involves three years as a State Registered Nurse and one year as a midwife. To find out more about this course contact the Royal College of Midwives, 15 Mansfield Street, W1. Tel: 580 6523. Probably the best comprehensive guide to natural childbirth can be provided by the National Childbirth Trust, 9 Queensborough Terrace, London W2, Tel: 229 9319. They will give you the name of your nearest teacher. The teachers vary a lot in their methods and you will be able to observe a wide range of techniques, and they will also provide you with the knowledge whereby you can judge the good reasons for inductions and caesareans. There is also the Leboyer method which is very child oriented and which is not practised by the NCT: I am sending you the names of a couple of practitioners of this method whom you can also contact if you wish.

Mens Groups

I support and as far as possible am involved in the Women's Movement, but the vast majority of my conversations are with women. Important as these are, they only take me so far in terms of sorting out what it means to be a male who is opposed to a sexist society, but who is living in one. Consequently I was very interested to read the article about the Men's Conference in *Spare Rib* No.32 and wondered if you could provide me with any information about men's groups active in London.
Yours faithfully
Stuart Eno
29 Chapter Chambers
Chapter Street
London SW1

* Contact Dan at 01-444 0711, and he'll let you know the addresses of groups, also information about the MAS bulletin.

Self Help

There is a Women's Liberation Group in Blackburn. We have been meeting for about 18 months and there are about 14 of us. We run a free pregnancy testing service every Saturday morning 11–1pm at Amamus bookshop in Blackburn and we can give free contraceptive advice as well. We are fairly knowledgeable about local doctors' attitudes on abortion and sterilisation.

Although we have consciousness raising sessions we haven't as yet done any group self examinations. Please contact us if you are interested.
Yours sincerely,
Sue Cox.
39 Alexandra Road,
Blackburn,
Lancashire.
Tel Blackburn 55089.

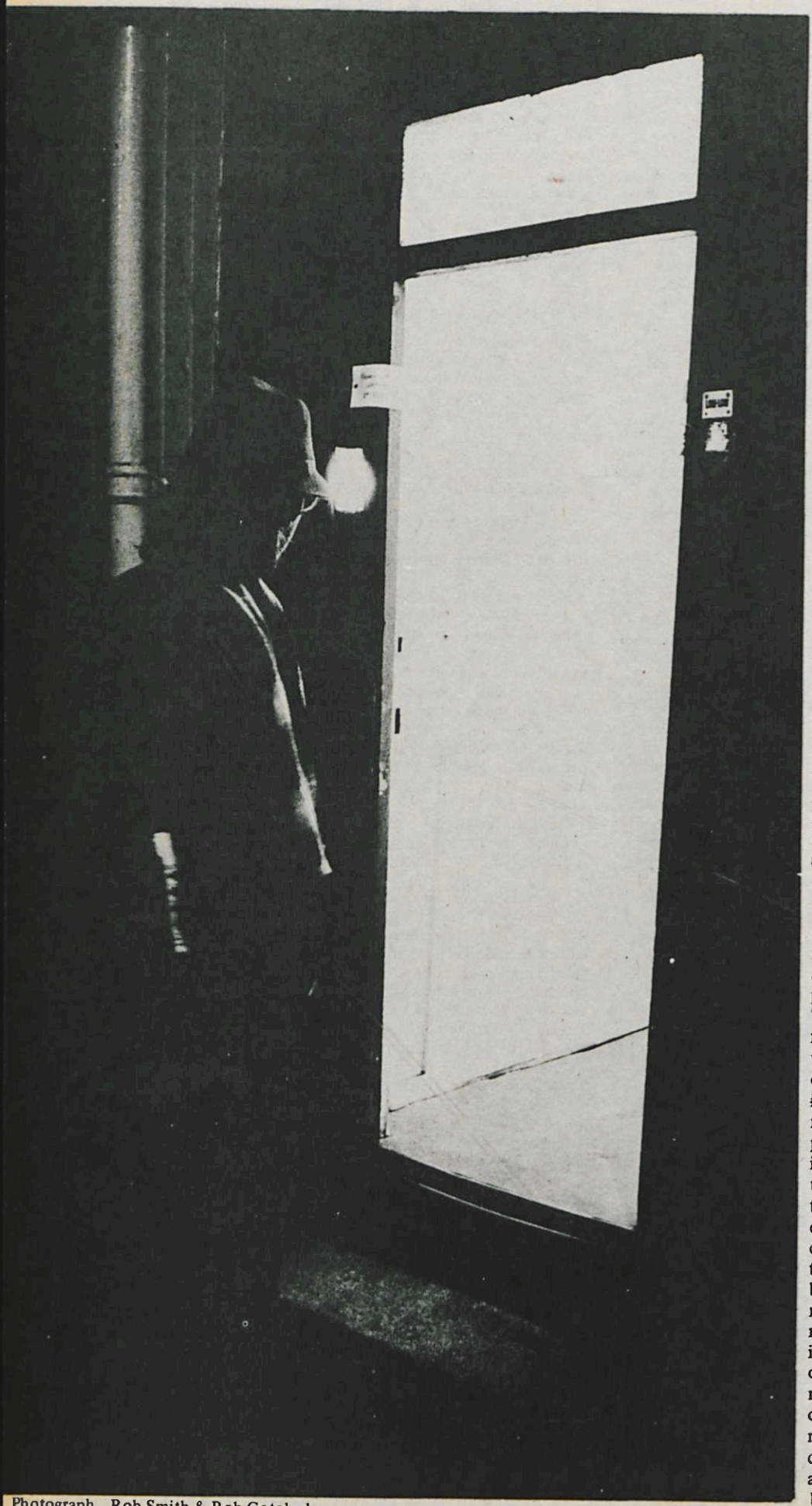
Hiring Films

Please could you send me any information you've got on films which could be hired by a women's group, titles, costs, availability etc. Or perhaps you could send me the addresses of organisations I could contact who have film libraries.
Alison Chippendale,
16 Bootham Terrace,
York.

In issue 33 of the magazine, there's a piece by Nancy Platt on women's films, along with a catalogue of the films available, their cost, and the names of the organisations which supply them. You can also contact the London Women's Film group c/o Francine Wynham, 3 Blenheim Road, London NW8 0LU. They also have a catalogue of their own films which are distributed by the Other Cinema. The National Film School too provides a list of women's films. For bookings contact Liz Kerry at the National Film School, Beaconsfield, Bucks. Tel Beaconsfield 71234

Info..Odds & Sods..Advice

Prostitution and the Law



Photograph Rob Smith & Rob Gotobed.

3,084 women were found guilty of offences relating to prostitution in 1972.
The laws on prostitution vividly illustrate the double standard existing in our society for women and men. The prostitute is penalised – the male client is untouched by the law. It is illegal for a woman who has been labelled as a "common prostitute" to solicit clients, while it is not illegal for a man to approach a woman. What possible justification is there for the laws on solicitation? The Government Working Party on Street Offences (1974) insists that the law is not punishing prostitution on the grounds of moral conduct, and explains why only the woman is punished, as follows:

> "It (the law) should confine itself to those activities which offend against public order and decency and expose the ordinary citizen to what is offensive or injurious: and the simple fact is that prostitutes do parade themselves more habitually and openly than their prospective customers, and do by their continual presence affront the sense of decency of the ordinary citizen."

If prostitutes are supposed to "affront the sense of decency", what about kerb crawlers, the men in cars who pursue women walking along city pavements? Kerb crawlers are not penalised – they are not considered to "offend against public order". The fact of the matter is that the laws relating to prostitution are laying down what is acceptable behaviour in women, and are a subtle example of how society controls women's sexuality.
Felicity Crowther explains the tangle of laws surrounding prostitution and the implications for a woman once labelled as a "common prostitute".

What is a prostitute?
What a woman must do to become a prostitute has been the subject of evasive interpretation, revealing more of masculine attitudes to sex than to prostitution. A prostitute has been described variously as "a female who offers her body commonly for lewdness in return for payment even though there is no sexual intercourse," or one who participates in "physical acts of indecency for the sexual gratification of men" or, more drastically, as a woman who participates in "illicit intercourse." Whether it is the acts themselves, the frequency of their performance or the payment for them that makes them lewd, indecent or illicit does not appear to have been considered. A case in 1963 decided that it is not necessary to indulge in "normal sexual intercourse" to be a prostitute. In that case, women who masturbated men in a massage parlour on request and received payment, (payment, incidentally, which they received from the owner of the parlour whether or not the massage included masturbation), were guilty of offering their bodies for common lewdness and were therefore prostitutes. Nor does it matter whether women play an active or passive part, or what parts of their bodies are used to gratify customers.

What is soliciting?

Prostitution, as such, is not illegal. What is illegal is soliciting. This was the big change effected by the Street Offences Act 1959, which followed the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report. Theoretically the report was mainly concerned with clearing the streets of prostitutes who brought a blush to the cheeks of respectable men and women who ventured out after dark: prostitution is acceptable if it's invisible. It states that "it shall be an offence for a common prostitute to loiter or solicit in a street or public place for the purpose of prostitution."

Penalties vary from up to three months in prison to fines of up to £25. The Wolfenden Report specifically eliminated the requirement that it must be established that the conduct of the prostitute caused annoyance to inhabitants, residents or passers-by. It has since been decided that the man she is trying to solicit does not even have to be aware of it. The curbs on soliciting drove the prostitutes indoors and led to more furtive methods of attracting customers. A judge decided in 1962 that an advertisement in a shop window, even one in the most explicit terms, did not constitute soliciting.

A policeman may arrest without warrant anyone in a public place suspected with reasonable cause to be soliciting. There are legal safeguards, although it is questionable whether they are known to the luckless woman who has been arrested. In London, a woman who has not been previously convicted of an offence relating to prostitution, is not charged unless she has been cautioned at least twice, and each caution has been formally recorded. If cautioned, she may apply within 14 days to the magistrate that no entry of the caution be made, or if made, that it be expunged, and the court must make that order unless satisfied that she intended to solicit. This all sounds very well until one considers the realities: a woman ignorant of her rights may well be locked up for several hours before she is released by an avuncular policeman, who will "let her off lightly that time." A woman who does know the law must confront the police and the magistrate (although mercifully the proceedings are in private) and argue her innocence in front of them in order to avoid acquiring a record as a common prostitute. Having once been labelled a common prostitute, it is fatal for a woman to linger in the streets.

What is a brothel?

Anyone in charge of premises who permits them to be used as a brothel or for the purposes of habitual prostitution commits an offence. Although the law concedes that a prostitute entertaining customers in her own room is not keeping a brothel (just so long as she keeps to her own room – if she swaps around rooms with her colleagues, and has any say in the running of the premises, she can be guilty), it is not necessary to prove that there is any indecency or disorderly conduct or any nuisance to the neighbours, nor is it necessary to prove that the women frequenting the brothel are known prostitutes or receive payment. At this point, I must admit to some confusion. A brothel has been legally defined as "a place promiscuously resorted to by persons of both sexes for the purposes of prostitution," and a prostitute as a woman "who offers her body for lewdness in return for payment." However, a place can become a brothel even when women not previously branded as prostitutes resort there to perform sexual acts for free and without disturbing the neighbours. Perhaps we should rely on the definition in the Wolfenden report, itself quoting with approval a case decided in 1931, that a brothel exists for "the purpose of illicit intercourse." However, "illicit" means no more or less than "unlawful" and the report is at pains to point out that prostitution is not itself unlawful. In practice, prosecutions for managing brothels are made only after careful scrutiny. Usually, a high ranking police officer will authorise a two day watch on suspected premises; a report is then prepared and submitted to another officer, who will authorise a five day watch before deciding whether or not to bring charges. It is hardly satisfactory, though, that the contradictions in this piece of legislation can be rationalised by the police making a policy decision.

The Licensing Act 1953 contains a provision that is particularly hard on prostitutes. If the holder of a license knowingly allows his premises to be the habitual resort or place of meeting of prostitutes (whether or not their object in being there is prostitution) he is committing an offence and runs the risk of having his license revoked if he allows them to stay there other than for the purpose of obtaining reasonable refreshment. This was intended no doubt to prevent a pub acquiring a bad name, but it could be abused. Consider, for example, a prostitute who wanted to relax in her local during her spare time – she can be evicted by the licensee after she has bought her drink.

What are immoral earnings?

A man is presumed to be living on the earnings of prostitution if it is proved that he lives with or is habitually in the company of a prostitute or has exercised control over her movements. (This provision affects men only. The equivalent charge against a woman is exercising control over the movements of prostitutes, although this would not necessarily involve proving that she made a financial profit from her influence.) This definition was extended in a notorious case which reached the House of Lords to include those who are paid by prostitutes for goods or services supplied for the purposes of prostitution, which the man would not supply but for the fact that they were prostitutes. One man who rented a room to a prostitute for an exorbitant rent between 9pm and 2am was convicted under this definition (he would have been convicted even if the rent was not exorbitant, since he rented the room to her only because she used it for prostitution). But a landlord who knowingly rented accommodation for ordinary residence to a prostitute for a market rent would not be guilty. The Wolfenden committee graciously conceded that a prostitute must have somewhere to live, just as she must have food to eat. An enterprising man, the subject of the House of Lords case, was convicted who compiled an elaborate catalogue called "The Ladies' Directory" which provided the information that was not so easily obtained after the passing of the Street Offences Act, and who was paid by the women whose charms he advertised.

The curbs on soliciting have driven prostitutes to rely on others – shopkeepers, landlords, hotel porters and pimps – to help her, and in the nature of things, these others are usually men. These associates are at risk only if they can be prosecuted under the laws relating to brothel-keeping or immoral earnings or for breaches of the Licensing Act. The prostitute, however, is constantly at risk, once she has been branded as a common prostitute if she loiters in the street, or drinks at a pub. If she lives in a nice flat and provides her services to selected rich customers, she will be safe from the law, but she may well be even more exploited by men. Usually, a man will have bought her a flat and installed her in it on the understanding that she will turn a proportion of her earnings over to him. She may attract the attention of a criminal gang if her earning power is high enough.

The Sexual Offences Act provides for fines and for forfeiture of a license on first conviction against those who run "refreshment houses" and allow prostitutes to be there. "Refreshment houses" are "all houses, rooms, shops or buildings kept open for public refreshment, resort or entertainment at any time between ten o'clock at night and five o'clock the following morning, not being licensed for the sale of beer, cider, wine or spirits." These provisions affect all women. They provide an excuse for anyone in charge of a public place of refreshment to evict women from the premises whenever they feel that they run the risk of being made liable to such a charge. Evidently such men consider that any woman who sits in a public place after a certain hour at night is there simply for the purposes of prostitution – an extension of the attitude that unaccompanied women in public places in the evening will do anything rather than be alone■

Felicity Crowther

If readers have questions about the law which they would like Felicity to answer in Spare Rib, *write to her c/o Spare Rib, 9 Newburgh Street, London W1 4XS. She is sorry that she cannot reply to letters personally.*

portrait of the artist



Marie Bashkirtseff – a contemporary of the Impressionists, who was amongst the earliest of the nineteenth century painters to use city life as subject matter.

by Rosie Parker

'Artist' is a particularly exclusive and powerful label. In our society, it conveys an idea of a personal specialness reserved for a chosen few. It can weigh heavily on those who do want it; isolating them, forcing them into a competitive situation and providing a daunting image for them to live up to. Marie Bashkirtseff was a nineteenth-century woman whose overriding ambition was to be called an artist. She kept a diary from the age of five until she died aged 24. Lucid and full of energy, it tells us exactly why she had the need and confidence to want to be an artist. And on a general level the diary reveals all the demands, the drawbacks and the status which the label had acquired.

Marie Bashkirtseff stopped writing ten days before her death in 1884. Her family, who worshipped her, found the pile of white exercise books and published extracts in two volumes – just as she hoped they would. "The life of a woman must always be interesting told thus day by day. Without any posing, *as if* no-one would ever read it," she wrote. She was a great admirer of French novelists who used everyday life as subject matter, particularly Zola, but above all she was convinced that she would make good reading – that she was quite remarkable. Her contemporaries agreed. Within a year of the diary's publication, the 'Union de femmes peintres et sculpteurs' devoted a room of their exhibition to her paintings, sculpture and drawings. They printed a catalogue containing poems addressed to her, reprints of her press notices and tearful eulogies on her work. By 1890 the diaries had been translated into English as "the drama of a woman's soul at odds with destiny" – valued for their equal-rights feminism and viewed with a mixture of piety and sentimentality. (All quotations used here come from that translation.) Today, in England, few people have heard of her except that Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, used her to illustrate some of the characteristic forms of narcissism in women. A narcissist "idolizes herself alone." Simone de Beauvoir writes, "A man who acts must necessarily size himself up, ineffective, isolated, woman can neither find her place nor take her own measure; she gives herself supreme importance because no object of importance is accessible to her. If she can thus offer herself to her own desires, it is because she has felt herself an object since childhood."

Marie Bashkirtseff was a Russian living in France. She prefaced her diaries with a brief description of her background – "old provincial Russian nobility . . . intellectual . . . brave . . . cultured . . . powerful." She was acutely aware that her origins and aspirations were at odds with her present circumstances as the daughter of separated parents living with her mother in Nice. At one point the stigma of having separated parents seemed to her too great to bear, and she went to Russia in an attempt to make her father move to France. Playing on his susceptibility to appearances she took 30 dresses with her, and gained his admiration by forcing herself to shine socially, shoot wolves and ride unbroken horses. He went back to France with her briefly.

Though she sided with her mother against her father, she felt at heart that her predominantly female household was foolish and inept and that she was the only strong one. She resented and was aware of the injustices inflicted upon her sex but was far too much of an individualist and too imbued with ideas of innate superiority and inferiority ever to identify with other women.

The family encouraged this sense of superiority and specialness. Her mother had gone to a fortune teller who predicted, "You have two children, the son will be like the rest of the world but your daughter will be a star." She was given the encouragement towards self-affirmation and self-expression usually reserved for a boy, while her brother Paul was pushed into the background. He married young and settled comfortably into a life on his father's estate. "From the age of three," Marie wrote, "I had aspired to future greatness and all that was talked of in our family seemed continually to refer to the triumphs which must inevitably come to me." She could only see achievement in terms of individual triumph, and later in life she was to suffer considerably from the isolation which her ambition inflicted upon her.

As a child her need for recognition and action were satisfied. First she wanted to be a ballet dancer, then a singer, and she always had an appreciative audience – "It moves one so much to be admired for more than one's dress" (12 years). Everything she did demanded encouraging applause because the options open to her were already narrow and centred around her person.

Marie Bashkirtseff, not surprisingly, believed that she would be paid (rewarded) for her singing with a handsome husband. Her elitism was so developed by the age of 12 that she saw her fantasies mirrored in an English aristocrat she watched riding round Nice. She dressed all in white, with little white dogs to match, and filled her diary with the Duke of Hamilton. "And when he sees a young lady who has reached the highest pinnacle of fame a woman can attain, who is pure and virtuous and has loved him faithfully from childhood, he will be so surprised that he will wish to have me at any price, and marry me from sheer pride. But what am I saying? Why shouldn't I suppose him capable of loving me?"

as a young woman



The women's studio at the Academy Julian by Marie Bashkirtseff

The early diary is a breathless jumble of conversational prose, naivete, dogmatism and acute psychological perception. One day she hears that the duke has married and describes her reaction in precise detail, even the anxiety state which the news precipitated. "Since the wretched busybody told me the dreadful news I am out of breath, and my heart aches and beats violently." She could no longer evade the reality of her own insignificance through fantasy.

However imaginary the relationship, her feelings were real enough. Women are pressured into estimating their self worth through their relationships, but Simone de Beauvoir believes that Marie Bashkirtseff's hunger for connection, love and affection was extreme even for her sex and her social situation; attributing her attitude to the circumstances of her early childhood. "It is not by chance that being weaned late – at 3½ – she felt strongly at the age of 4–5 the need to make herself admired, to live for others. The shock of weaning must have been violent in a child so old and she must have tried the more passionately to compensate for the separation inflicted upon her." Simone de Beauvoir goes on to point out that all children try to compensate for this initial separation by show-off and enticing behaviour but a little girl can only be successful in attracting love and attention by becoming a passive object of pleasure for others.

Somehow Marie Bashkirtseff had to satisfy her need for exclusive intimacy and her compulsion towards action and achievement. Whereas most women in her position relied on being loveable, she wanted to earn love. Fame she believed would bring her the admiration she needed. "To be celebrated and to be loved, as Balzac says, that is happiness . . . and yet to be loved is only an accessory or rather the natural result of being celebrated."

Her desire for fame was basically an expression of her fear of mediocrity and powerlessness. And attaining fame would justify and satisfy her self-love. Her determination and class confidence might have enabled her to fulfil this ambition – compared to male painters, a far greater proportion of known women painters have come from the aristocracy. But the external and internal barriers created by the social definition of femininity stopped her. "Yes, I with all my impulses, all my immense desire and fever for life, I am always stopped like a horse by the bit. It foams, rages and rears but it is stopped all the same."

She developed an imaginary release from the frustration of finding herself, an active being, restricted to a passive life style. "I am my own heroine," she wrote and described how she internalized the contradiction of simultaneously being her own person and an object for others. "I am so peculiarly constituted that I regard my life as something apart from me, and on that life I have fixed all my ambitions and hopes." She was not content to sit and spin fantasies of future fame and glory, she started to shape her life and set out to educate herself. "After a day passed in shopping and seeing dressmakers, I put on a dressing-gown and read Plutarch." She could already speak Russian, French, English and Italian when she drew up a curriculum which demanded eight hours work a day. Aged 13 she noted with annoyance that, "all boys as soon as moustaches being to grow fancy that women can't reason and understand. They consider they are dolls who talk without knowing what they say. They listen to them with an air of protection."

Anger and frustration spurred her on. She read constantly, everything from Homer, Livy and Dante to Balzac, George Sand and Zola, but commented with her usual honesty, "I shall not be a poet, a philosopher or a savante. I can only be a singer or a painter. A vain creature like me must stick to painting, for that is an imperishable work. That's something at least. And then I want to be in the fashion; ▷

that is the chief thing. Do not shake your heads at me stern judges; do not criticize me with affected indifference. Be more just and remember you are the same, at heart. You are careful not to show it, but that does not prevent you from knowing in your inmost hearts that I am speaking the truth. Vanity! Vanity! Vanity! The beginning and end of everything."

In 1877 at the age of 18 she became a full-time student at Julian's academy in Paris. She believed that she was motivated by vanity for several reasons. Firstly, she had no need to paint to earn her living; she painted to earn love and admiration. And secondly she could never, or hardly ever, lose herself in an activity. She as subject was constantly watching herself as object, directing and producing her life and savouring the image of herself as artist. On the rare occasion when her crippling self-consciousness left her, she described her pleasure in painting for its own sake . . . "If I could go on working as I have done these few days past, I should be very happy. It is not a mere question of working like a machine but of being continually occupied and thinking all the time about one's work."

She couldn't achieve such self absorbtion for long because, as Olive Schriener puts it – "the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us by the ends it sets before us. To you (men) it says *Work* and to us it says – *Seem*."

Discussing a fellow pupil at the Academie Julian, Marie Bashkirtseff comments, "She is entirely devoted to her art, but as for me, I invent gowns, I dream of draperies, of bodices." She spent ages gazing at her body in the mirror, transfixed sometimes for 20 minutes at a time by her skin after a bath. "When I think of what I shall be at 20, I smack my lips."

Brought up to believe in her own perfection and desirability she loved herself. Self loving she may have been, but self accepting she wasn't. Aware that she was failing to live up to the impossible vision of her own perfection, which had been impressed upon her as a child, she transferred her love for herself into a love of what she would like to be, an ideal self. She blamed herself for not being the ideal. "I have a terrible disease; I am disgusted with myself . . . to hate another person you can avoid is one thing, to hate yourself, that is indeed torture."

Fear of failure coupled with absence of proof of success tortured her but her physical disease, the TB which was to kill her, didn't concern her greatly. For every 100 women aged 20 at the time, more than five would be dead from TB by the age of 30, and more than eight would be dead by the age of 50 – rates twice as high as for men. It was perhaps the prevalence of TB amongst young women that explains her absolute conviction that she would die young, and her comparative calm as she began to develop symptoms: "Dr Charcot has just left; I was present at the consultation, and heard afterwards what the doctors said to each other because I am the only person who keeps calm and collected." Summoning her strongest reserve, she called her vanity into play and defied the disease.



The Meeting – print of an oil painting

She was carted round from one European watering place to another in an effort to arrest the TB which first attacked her throat, putting an end to her singing, and then her ears, causing the deafness which she found utterly crushing: "The mount of intelligence it robs you of! How can one be bright and witty. Ah, all is over." She hated the thought that people would pity her but didn't seem to worry that her deafness might cut her off from others. Yet, perfect communication with another person was her recurrent dream: "Is there anyone who could understand me thoroughly to whom I could say everything . . . who could understand all, and in whose conversation I should recognise my own thoughts." Keeping a diary was her way of dealing with the isolation which her ambition inflicted upon her. Like Narcissus she could only really love her own reflection. She did once catch sight of her reflection in somebody else – a cardinal's son in Rome called Pietro Antonelli. "Altogether he is so like me that it is extraordinary." Inevitably she projected her ambivalent feeling about herself onto the relationship and wavered between loving herself in him, feeding off his admiration for her, and feeling ashamed, believing him unworthy of her. She once allowed him to kiss her and suffered awful remorse. Her white diary, white clothes, white trunks and white dogs all symbolized her belief that purity equalled superiority. "Marie kissed by a man, Marie the proud, the severe, the haughty . . . I won't admit that I gave way to any weakness or momentary impulse. If I were to admit it I should no longer esteem myself."

At the same time she desperately wanted to be spontaneous, and cursed her irrevocable detachment. "Of the two selves who are trying to live, one says to the other, but in heaven's name have a sensation of some kind." Any sensations she might have had were cloaked and distorted by her contradictory notions of romantic love. There was the ego boosting medieval courtly love: "to be loved by a man sufficiently inferior to yourself to look upon you as a goddess from heaven, would have a certain charm." This was superficially at odds with the idea of love as selfless sacrifice, "One thing which is truly beautiful and worthy of the heroic age: that self annihilation of a woman before the superiority of the man she loves." For a while she felt guilty at not achieving glorious self annihilation but wrote finally, "I have not yet understood how one can give one's life for a being whom one loves – a perishable being." She had no models other than these two which both implied power relationships – submission and dominance.

If status and identity were not to be had through a man she would become an artist. "If I were to become a great painter I should have the right before my own consciousness of having feelings and opinions of my own. I might have been happy in being nothing but the beloved of a man who would be my glory . . . but now I must be somebody in my own right."

Only fame and the label 'artist' could provide her with confirmation of her



The Cigarette – print of a sketch



Portrait of a Woman – print of an oil painting

ability. Yet, the more she idolized the notion of the great genius, the less she felt able to paint.

And she soon discovered that as a woman she wasn't eligible for genius. There was not even a stereotype for the woman artist. "The legend of the woman artist, a vagabond, a perverted being without industry or talent – repulsive, hungry, beautiful", no longer existed, she wrote, adding that in the nineteenth century women artists were just seen as dull. At the Academie Julian, if a woman did good work it was taken to the men's studio to shame them into action. Women's painting, she was told, was "rendered painful by its weakness and fancifulness." The greatest compliment a woman could be paid was to be told that she painted like a man. Marie Bashkirtseff reacted by denying that she was a woman, "there is nothing of the woman about me but the envelope."

Nevertheless she was acutely aware of the discrimination facing women artists. She fumed that women were not allowed into the Ecole de Beaux Arts and led the women from Julian's studio in a concerted effort to gain admission. They were turned away. "It was explained to us that these 50 young men being under no supervision it was absolutely impossible."

She resented bitterly the people who didn't believe she painted her own pictures, "because I am so pretty and well dressed," and hated "the idiots who think that my painting is the amusement of a woman of the world." Above all she regretted the lack of freedom which her sex inflicted upon her. The subjects which really interested her were street scenes but she couldn't sketch or observe at will in the streets. "I must wait for my carriage, my lady companion or my family, curse it all, it is this that makes me gnash my teeth to think I am a woman."

This increasing awareness of women's position led her to an equal rights meeting in Paris during 1880. She viewed the proceedings cynically and went home to mock the meeting in her diary, "young fellows with long hair . . . a president who looks dirty and very stupid . . ." She criticized the meeting for discussing "shades of political opinion" rather than "woman in general who is claiming her rights." It was neither surprising that she failed to make the connection between feminism and socialism nor that she never went back. Solidarity was after all quite foreign to her, "No matter what I say, we shall have to go on shrieking and making ourselves ridiculous (I will leave that to others) in order to gain this equality a hundred years hence. As for myself I will try to set an example by showing society a woman who shall have made her mark in spite of all the disadvantages which hampered her."

She continued in her contradictory way to pay lip service to equality – "The republic and the equality of man and woman are the only thing to which I am sincerely attached." But of course she had found a new elite with the artist instead of the Duke of Hamilton at the top. A letter which she wrote to her teacher contains a typical comment, "My head is full of paintings and these people cannot understand the noble preoccupations of our kind."

She worked very hard despite her growing weakness and her demoralising competitiveness with other women. "Marie Breslau is constantly on my mind. I do not make a stroke without wondering how she would do it." Only the diary was allowed to see her self doubt; she presented a confident facade to the world while writing, "Never, never have I sounded the depth of despair as I have today. To say to yourself, 'It isn't the fault of circumstances, nor of your family, nor of the world, but of your own want of talent.' "

Just before she died she won a medal at the annual salon. It reassured her slightly but she admitted that nothing could satisfy her. Her ambition was created by her sense of inadequacy (her failure to live up to her ideal self) and her ambition only stoked her feelings of inadequacy.

Hopelessly ill and unable to paint she developed a relationship with another young dying painter, Bastien Lepage. The final entries describe how they sat together all day, "in a tranquil but painless indifference. I only go there from habit; it is his shadow, I also am half shadow." It reduces you to tears, after 700 pages of self portraiture you feel you know her well. But her narcissism and detachment persisted and acted as a protective shell. Four days before the diary ends, Bastien Lepage was carried to see her. "I was dressed in a cloud of white lace and plush, all different shades of white; the eyes of Bastien Lepage dilated with delight.

'Oh, if only I could paint,' he said.

And I –

Finis. And so ends the picture of this year!" ○

Women's Employers:
General Electric Company

The women on strike at Salford Electrical Instruments were not an isolated case. Their situation was part of the growth of huge firms who own factories all over the world. These multinational companies make big profits and it is difficult to fight them because they can easily keep workers divided and ignorant of another's struggles. The S.E.I. women faced one of the largest of these combines, the General Electric Company.

This is the first of two articles which gives the economic context of the company. The second article in our next issue will be about the action taken by women workers against the company.

by Marsha Rowe



5,000 employees begin their march to demonstrate against the closure of the AEI factory in Woolwich.

Back in 1967-68 the General Electric Company merged, first with the Associated Electrical Industries and then with the English Electric Company, to become the GEC-AEI combine. GEC is the fifth largest company and the largest private employer in the UK, and the eighth largest of the world electrical corporations.

The merger was implemented by the same Labour Government which had increased the size of the Monopolies Commission. The Board of Trade did not think it was necessary to refer this combination of companies, under the directorship of Sir Arnold Weinstock, to the Monopolies Commission. In fact, they only halted three mergers out of 120 in the period 1965-68. The merger was encouraged as part of the Government's programme aimed to "yield substantial benefits to the national economy, especially in terms of increased exports and more rapid technological advance" (George Brown, House of Commons, January 1969)[1].

Arnold Weinstock's aim for GEC-AEI is efficiency. "Making more money is the only measure of more efficiency," said his Personnel Manager, Sir Jack Scamp, in 1969. Between 1970 and 1974 the pre-tax profits of GEC increased from £58 million to £151 million. GEC has carefully cut back production of goods it considers not profitable and made 38,000 people redundant in the name of efficiency and rationalisation over the last four years.



Weinstock has fired people left, right and centre wherever he has decided their labour was not in a money-making direction. GEC's production in Britain has gone down by 15% between 1969 and 1974 (*Labour Research,* September 1974)[2]. The wages of GEC employees have gone up by only 47% despite the much higher increase in trading profit per employee of 95% in the same five years. The activities of employers like GEC pose fantastic problems to the many unions involved in its work force. The average earnings of GEC employees in 1972-73 were £29 per week (£1,512 a year). But this is not an accurate average since it includes £10,000 a year *each* paid to 35 senior management employees. "GEC's value to its shareholders has been increased by £108 million from those profits created by the workers," in the four years since its merger, commented the Labour Research Department in its pamphlet on GEC.[3]

GEC here rules people out of work.

The first GEC redundancies were hectic. They involved the awesome responsibility for the loss of 5,500 jobs for people living in Woolwich in 1968, and they were desperately and unsuccessfully countered by three mass demonstrations and shop floor efforts. The union leaders did not direct a combine wide fight against the closures and the rank and file were not able to. MPs who had originally supported the merger, supported the closure of the factory. "Redundancies must not only be expected, but must be welcomed as a step in the direction of greater efficiency" (John Stonehouse, then Minister of State for Technology, since dropped his responsibilities and flown to Australia), and the redundancy scheme was described by Clive Jenkins as "The most civilised I have ever encountered." Two years later, over half the workers said they were unhappy in what new jobs they'd been able to find, their lives had gone haywire and their level of earnings had dropped by 15%. The ratepayers in Woolwich were faced with what amounted to 3½d in the £1 rise for the loss of rates suffered. So not only does the security of workers lives tumble down around their ears but others in the town, and its trade, suffer as well. "This is only a part of what amounts to a subsidy from the local community to GEC shareholders." (*The General Electric Company Limited,* CIS Anti-Report.)

Overseas its manufacture increases.

GEC's planning is rapidly taking its own organisation overseas. Its investment is directed to where it can pay even lower wages. As the number of GEC employees has fallen in this country by thousands, down to 170,000 last year, so the numbers it employs overseas have increased slightly, up to 32,000 last year, and its production overseas has grown enormously, 56% in the last five years.
It has subsidiaries and associate companies in Africa, North America, Asia, Australia, South America and Western Europe. To GEC (South Africa), 1971 was a year, "as expected, one of consolidation with further advances in output and profitability."[4]
What of this complacent success? The maximum an African worker for GEC can earn for a 45 hour week is £9.49. This is less than the South African Chamber of Commerce poverty line of £10.50 per week in 1972.

But GEC measures its efficiency by its profits, and the size of these profits are reviewed every month by Weinstock himself and compared to the size of the work force. GEC has found it profitable to pay its overseas workers literally starvation wages. It has found it profitable to concentrate on research and production into arms electronics, like computers for spotting and napalming used in Vietnam or navigation attack systems in Europe. CIS calculates this side as a quarter of GEC's turnover and expects it to increase because the costs are "normally included in the contract price for military supplies" and are therefore a secure investment (CIS Anti-Report).

GEC strict management control.

GEC, especially, finds it profitable to appoint super-profit-conscious managers who will oppose employees' wage claims as a matter of principle. "People are like elastic, the more work they have to do the more they stretch," Sir Arnold Weinstock, *Financial Times,* 27.5.69.

More profits out of money.

The activities of the multi-national companies like GEC represent a fantastic problem to any national government, whether left wing or right wing. During the 50s the Tory Government opened up the City for the free exchange of capital and the international flow of money became a flood. The ingenuity of the multi-nationals in taking advantage of the lifted restrictions to carry out further currency speculation – making money out of money – has been one of the reasons for Britain's recurrent balance of payments crisis.[5]

The results of competition become the reasons for redundancy.

Multi-nationals are expanding into each other's markets. British investment has moved from its disintegrating old Commonwealth markets into the European Common Market. GEC can put its case to government that this concentrated competition between it and other companies for power plant orders has produced a "surplus capacity for power plant production." This was the excuse given for the violent closures behind the government backed GEC-AEI merger.

Multi-nationals do what they want.

Investment goes out and investment comes in. Compared to the £83 million put into the EEC countries in the three years up to 1971, British companies' investment in the EEC "had reached £985 million and it may well be approaching £1,500 million▷

by now." Political alliances alter as a result, and new international clashes develop Foreign multi-national investment in Britain continues. When it gets the shivers it decides to pull out, as the women at Imperial Typewriters, Hull, found out in February this year.

Companies like the General Electric Company Limited take exploitation to its painful limits in order to make millions of pounds. Their philosophic justification is called freedom. "These people interfere with the rights of others," replied Weinstock, denouncing a shareholder who asked questions about GEC South African operations.

Most newspaper accounts also follow this haughty policy, whether they are about strikes or about trade unionists' suspicion of wage control. The blame is put on the working people, the fault, it's implied, is theirs.

But we must question who's responsible for Britain's failure to modernise production following the switch from reconstruction to military expenditure after the Second World War. Why, for instance, funds could be directed not to manufacturing but to property development or overseas where profits could be made without employing British workers? We must question how it is possible to reconstruct the British economy when the costs continue to fall on the wage earners in Britain and the gains go to the employers. (Between the 1950s and the 70s tax on profits halved while the tax on wages increased more than four times.)

We must question the way government demands support by trade unions of a policy which cuts wages in the misguided belief this alone will cheapen production and therefore increase exports. When a consumption boom fails, when a slump occurs, there is a frantic attempt to stimulate exports. Yet this way of fixing things up has already been shown to be dodgy when it was the economists' advice to the Labour Government in the mid 60s, and it is even less likely to be viable now with the drop in world trade.

Finally, we must question not only the power relations between the employers, the government and workers, but also within the working class, between men and women workers.

The women in the GEC complex have thus been resisting not only Weinstock and the power of international capital, but have been struggling for a more equal position as women. They will not be shut up as easily as the shareholders for, unlike them, their very lives are at stake □

1 *The General Electric Company Limited,* from Counter Information Services, 9 Poland Street, London W1. 25 pence. For reasons behind GEC-AEI merger, and accounts of its operations. Quotes used by MPs and GEC top brass come from this pamphlet.

2 'General Electric Company', *Labour Research* Vol.63, No.9. Published monthly by Labour Research, 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF. 23½ pence.

3 *The General Electric Company Limited,* from LRD, 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF. Facts and figures about GEC up to 1973. 10 pence.

4 Same as *1* above.

5 *Britain's Economic Crisis* by The Cambridge Political Economy Group from The Partisan Press, Bertrand Russell House, Gamble Street, Nottingham NG7 4ET. 30 pence.

6 *The Menace of the Multi-nationals,* from LRD, 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF. 20 pence.



Former AEI factory in Woolwich. It manufactured Strowger telephone exchanges for the Post Office. Staff wanted nationalisation. Labour Government said that would result in overproduction. Post Office since blames delays in telephone installation on inadequate supplies.

REVIEWS

BOOKS

Female Friends by Fay Weldon (Heinemann: £2.75)

Chloe, too humble, self-effacing and passive; Grace, too self-absorbed, hysterical and egotistical; Marjorie, too reproachful, depressed and bitter. These are the three female friends whose lives Fay Weldon sketches from adolescence into middle-age. Do their lives personify the female condition? In many ways they seem to, and certainly I think they are meant to.



Fay Weldon

She is a feminist. In all her books she portrays brilliantly much of the essence of women's oppression. At some stage in their lives these three women have all sought their salvation through their men. And their men are all selfish, sadistic, sexually repressed, perverted and cruel.

Through their adolescence the three girls have all watched Grace's father mocking, tormenting and finally destroying, his gentle wife. Their adult lives have all been linked to that of the self-absorbed, exploitative artist Patrick, callously groping his way to fame. Chloe's life is afflicted and stifled by her husband Oliver. She's denied all possibility of autonomous or creative activity as she daily pacifies Oliver's frustrated ego, and copes with the children. She realises early that married life is difficult, "unless, of course, she can continue forever to subjugate her own interests in the way she so far has." "After all, he earns the money. The least Chloe can do is cope with his temperament."

The women are trapped by their kids. "How can Chloe leave? How can she carve through the patterns of dependency and hope, in the interests of something so impractical and elusive as personal happiness?" What jobs can women get anyway, when like Chloe they've usually abandoned careers or training for their marriage. Most women get little real help from their husbands with the kids. "So Oliver assures Chloe when she complains about the burden of the children. And who pays, he asks? Not you, but me. Yes thinks Chloe, in her heart, but your money is easily earned. I pay with my time and energy, my life itself."

But though she is a perceptive feminist, and vaguely bohemian, Weldon's politics are solidly middle-class. She comments here and there on social exploitation. Chloe's mum, a barmaid, is paid pitiful wages for exhausting work. "It is as well Gwyneth is so fond of cleaning, for being a widow with a child, that is the direction in which her future clearly lies." But the specific milieu of people Weldon is depicting, a world of artists and media people, perhaps a world where egotism and complacency are at their height, narrows the scope of her book as a reflection of women's lives. (You might think her talents are wasted on her characters.)

In this world, life appears to revolve around the relationships between individuals, the encounters, erotic and manipulative, between individuals. "No-one lies dead in a coffin but that our neglect has sent them there, or else it was our death wishes sickening the air about them while they lived. Or perhaps we have overlain them with the great weight of motherly or wifely love, and crushed the life and spirit out of them . . . Our fault." Our salvation is also our individual responsibility, nothing happens to us by accident, we choose everything that happens to us, "marry the wrong man because we cannot let ourselves be happy . . ."

But Weldon is wrong here. Our oppression, sexual and social, is not our fault. And nor can we, simply as individuals, do a lot towards changing it. Doesn't anything ever change? Weldon's characters ask again and again. It doesn't really, Weldon replies. "How can we recover from the spasms of terror that assail us, in our marriages and in our lives?" Although at one point Marjorie says, "we should interfere more in each other's lives, and not just pick up the pieces", this is not a moral Weldon really seems to believe in.

I think this is a good novel to read. Though it's not so good as her last one, *Down Among the Women*, which moved me more often to tears and rage.

Lynn Segal

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the alienated, always servicing, and so dependent mum

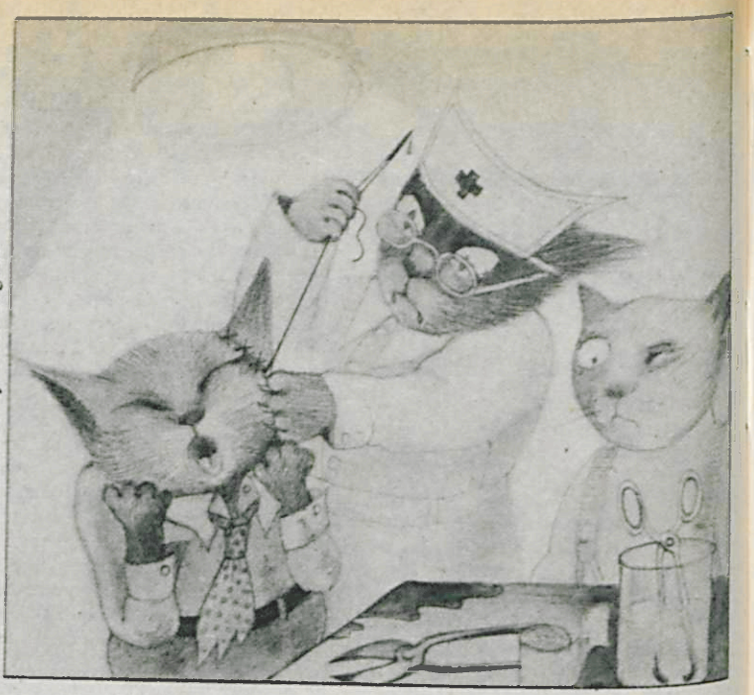


a mouse mushed in the mincer



mum, simpering in the kitchen

Illustrations by Tomi Ungerer



the pain of having your torn ear sewn on again

Kid's Books

No Kiss For Mother by Tomi Ungerer (Methuen £1.30)

From the title to the last detail this is not a picture-book for the soft-hearted; it's an aggressive but humorous portrayal of family conflict - in this case a cat family - and Piper's fight for self respect and autonomy against his ever kissing mother.

The storyline of *No Kiss For Mother* is the familiar theme of the naughty child - usually male - who repents and makes peace with flowers - for mum; see especially Ardizzone's *Johnny's Bad Day,* 1970. But where this book is different and special is that on the way to this traditional cop out, Ungerer gives all the detail of Piper's struggle against his loving, smothering and controlling mother; a very convincing picture this of the alienated always servicing and so dependent mum. Those who know Ungerer's other children's books and his poster work will not be surprised to find in this book an uncompromising concern for detail as well as a certain relish for violence and discomfort. A mouse is comprehensively 'mushed' in the mincer while the pain of having your torn ear sewn on again could not be more dramatically shown. In this book, Ungerer's many talents are happily fused to provide an exciting but sober framework for the story's dramatic developments.

Throughout the imaginative illustrations and layout are as rich and appealing in their black and white as any of the full colour variety of children's books; certainly they provide a compelling picture of a schoolboy's world and his fight against the forces that constrain him, his dad's authority (for once actually shown *at* work - a rat processing plant), his mother's kisses, school, adults generally.

The unusual division of a picture book into chapters allows Ungerer to contrast the violence of home and school and thus in the third chapter to demonstrate their interaction. The text provides some lively dialogue, but could do with stringent pruning, especially if read aloud.

No Kiss For Mother has been rightly seen by one critic as a children's *Portnoy's Complaint.* Indeed, like Portnoy, Piper is pursuing a strategy for survival against the formidable odds of the home situation in which his mother looms large. This detailed and sympathetic exploration of the child's viewpoint confirms Ungerer as a champion of the children's world against silly and selfish adults. It seems that Ungerer himself has not yet left that particular battlefield and in this book is living out his childhood male fantasies. Like Portnoy's mother, Piper's mum is the enemy to be reckoned opposed and outmanoevred; the accuracy of this portrayal of an undoubtedly sexist family scenario is as welcome to children as it is to adults.

Regrettably Ungerer doesn't stop there and peoples his canvas with females that are unacceptable stereotypes; the battleaxe nurse, Miss Purrypot the school marm, the class room victims in ribbons etc. Piper is the unchallenged male hero and mum finishes up simpering in the kitchen fit only to receive a bunch of flowers.

Andrew Mann
Children's Rights Workshop



mum, fit only to receive a bunch of flowers

Theatre

Women's Theatre Group 'My Mother says I never should . . .'

The Women's Theatre Group's second show has been made to take round schools and other relevant educational places - polys, training colleges, youth clubs - to show to kids from 13 upwards. It centres on two girls of 15, one 'easily led', as they say, the other a rather more sensible girl, but both examples of girls who will leave school at 16, with few job expectations of any interest, only dreams, adolescent interest in clothes, make-up, boys, sex.

The play is really an alternative lesson - a radical morality - or rather a radical anti-morality play. Wendy, the 'easy' girl, without quite realising it, gets fucked at a party. She is afraid she's pregnant, and with the support of her more sensible mate, Terry, goes to a pregnancy advisory centre to have a test and a chat with a sympathetic gynaecologist. Fortunately she isn't pregnant and accepts the gynaecologist's recommendation to go on the pill, though Terry, when asked, says frankly that she doesn't think she's ready for it yet.

Summarised like that the play sounds rather heavy-handed; but the way in which the didactic element comes easily out of realistic situations makes it a provocative and interesting piece. There are a number of ideas running through the play, and each has its roots in recognisable situations: Terry trying to get an embarrassed and uptight Mum to tell her what sex 'feels like', and Mum getting more and more buried in her ironing; the biology teacher trying to teach adolescent girls about the reproductive system as though she were talking about frogs, and both Mum and teacher quite obviously in as much trouble, from their inability to discuss such things frankly, as the girls are almost led into, by the ignorance forced on them by the adults.

The message in the play is clearly one of a positive and enlightened attitude to the realities of early sexual experience, and in its exposition raises two political points which pervade the play: the first is the development of mutual trust and support between women at different levels. This happens at peer group level, between the girls themselves, after a bit of struggle between generations of women, and in the particular instance shown, between the gynaecologist and the girls. The second point which articulates the trust developed, is the continuous stress on how important it is for us to talk about the untalkable, and to share experience in an active and supportive way. This makes the play an illustration of a consciousness-raising process which can happen in quite ordinary situations.

As I've already said, the play has clear didactic aims, and the themes are structured, written and acted with clarity. It will always be followed by discussions, in small groups where possible, with members of the cast in each group. The play as it stands - if one simply read the script or saw it without a discussion, for example - could be criticised for its omissions and simplifications. Omissions include any discussion of abortion, boys' attitudes, other methods of contraception, VD. Simplifications include the fact that social conflict over the question of pregnancy is confined to conflict between generations - there is no sense of the strength of real opposition that most girls might have to fight (or do have to fight) from parents, teachers and the medical profession. But having listed all these, it would be wrong to see them as criticisms of 'the play'. Because the group is as committed to the discussion as they are to the play itself, their intentions are to use the play as a springboard to talking about the omissions and the simplifications, as well as the issues actually raised within the play. There is thus a play behind the play, and messages after the message. And the impression left by the 'play' itself then becomes one of a positive potential, a possible goal rather than an inaccurate picture of reality.

Alongside the play runs commentary in song, illustrating the political points as they come up - how hard it is to talk about things, how hard it is to live your own life, a situating of the play in the context of women's double oppression in the home and outside, and the problems for working class girls. Occasionally the songs are so full and so demanding in their own right that they take over from the action, but in saying this I may be voicing only a subjective response which will be tested in performances by reactions there.



My mother said I never should . . .

I saw the play in an audience of teachers, and it was interesting that the comments covered a fair gamut of responses - too permissive, too mild, identification from both working and middle class girls, fears of backlashes from parents with strong principles, praise for bringing out a taboo subject into the frank open, etc. etc. What seems certain is that the play has the confidence of a group who have worked out what it is they want to say, and to whom.

Michelene Wandor

Anyone interested in contacting the group to book them can do so

c/o Mica Nava
29 Netherhall Gardens
London NW3
01-794 2445

They generally charge £35 for a performance, and will be doing the play until the end of the summer term.

Film

[redacted]

simple-minded. But that, I suspect, is precisely why it's so disturbingly effective. The film has been immensely successful in the States, and will probably do almost as well in an England increasingly nervous about bombers and muggers and kidnappings. For it hooks into very real fantasies - our growing fears of violence. our frustrated anger at the difficulties and dangers of city life. And just because it works in cardboard cliches, it manages to stimulate and reassure our anxieties.

The theme of *Death Wish* is urban anarchy; it picks up and exaggerates images familiar in dozens of recent American movies. New York is its predictable setting - the New York that has become a screen archetype, city of all our nightmares. An uneasy, explosive city where muggers and rapists and junkies lurk in every street and subway, where no one is safe, even locked inside his own home. A city under siege, where a walk through the night streets is a walk through a war zone, where the police are more and more helpless. The film proposes a simple solution to all this: violence must be met with violence. Not by a cop, this time, but by an ordinary man

[redacted]



George Segal and Elliott Gould in *California Split.*

American way of life in Korea in 1950, he takes up his gun in seventies New York, in a war that's even more crucial to our survival. And - as in war time - woman sums up everything the men are fighting to preserve. She is the absence that makes sense of the rest of the film; a memory, a dream, a symbol.

In its crude way, I suspect *Death Wish* spells out the underlying fantasies of increasing numbers of popular American films. The cop films that run their predictable, escalating cycle, the recent crop of 'disaster' movies (from *Earthquake* to *Towering Inferno* to *The Taking of Pelham 123*) are all, at the deepest level, *war* films - films about civilians trying to survive in a state of war. After you've seen a few, the trite stories merge in your mind; what remains are battle images - men struggling for life in a burning skyscraper, a city razed to the ground, an airplane struggling back to base, literally on a wing and a prayer, bombings and shooting and looting on the city streets. The idea of war seems to sum up and objectify some of our deepest dreads about the way we live. But it's an ambivalent idea - because these movies are curiously nostalgic as well. It's as if men can only be men, nowadays, in a state of emergency; in time of war, all issues become simple, and all a man has to do is fight alongside his buddy for what he believes in. And - as in wartime, or rather the myth in wartime - women are treated gently and considerately. (Women and children are the first to be taken from the burning skyscraper, and the men who saved the plane in Airport 75 had wives

California Split Directed by Robert Altman

The theme of male comradeship has been a major element in the American cinema since the western. And the mass of partnership movies that have emerged recently, regardless of their differences, owe a great deal to that form. *Midnight Cowboy, Easy Rider, Two Lane Blacktop, The Last American Hero, Thunderbolt and Lightfoot, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* - all rely on male friendship as the central relationship, the dominant theme. As in the western, women assume a subordinate role in the action. They can be angels or bitches, wives or whores, but never buddies. Peter Fonda's motor bike could have been a horse; his attitude to women was no different from that of the cowboys. Occasionally the films have themselves been conscious of their male chauvinism, sometimes even parodying it. In *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* Jeff Bridges honks his horn as he overtakes a female motor cyclist. She responds by producing a hammer and banging the side of his truck as he goes by.

But in *California Split* it is the heterosexual love relationship which is being parodied. George Segal and Elliott Gould play a couple of gamblers who team up not so much because they need to be gamblers, but because they need to be partners. The relationship is sexually ambiguous. Ostensibly they are two attractive, overtly sexual men. Both have an easy time with women. But it is the relationship between them which dominates the film. Other couples in the movie are all partners too, enhancing and illuminating the central couple almost the way that the central couple in a Shakespearean comedy are decorated by subordinate couples, subplots. A topless waitress borrows money so that her girlfriend can gamble. The two call-girls who offer shelter to our heroes are far more interested in each other.

No female character is given an important place in the action. Those that do appear are dull, stereotyped. The two heroes meet at the poker table, and from the first contact the relationship sparks into fire. Later they return to the same casino, but this time they are placed at different tables, among women. They are the only men. The women are bad players and bad sports. The men have to slow down, and they can't wait to get back together.

The friendship between them parodies the conventional love relationship without being sexual itself. Scenes when they are together are an odd blend of hearty drinking and flirtation. Elliott Gould - more reckless and impetuous than Segal - urges him to get away from work and meet him at the race track. He goes because he's infatuated. It's the kind of thing you do when you're in love. Gould returns from Mexico and his friend pouts like a spoilt mistress: "Maybe I'd like to have gone with you." The implication is that this relationship - because there is no sex, and because it's between two reasonable creatures, males - would never seriously fall into that kind of trap. That's only for women.

Fun is the key - more valuable than sex. The casino, the race track, the basketball court, replace the nightclubs and bedrooms of a love affair. But the relationship runs along the same lines. They meet, they groove while their luck is soaring, and they part before the deal goes down. The film is tight, fast-moving, and exciting. The exhilaration of the game is the exhilaration of love. The friendship lasts as long as the winning streak.

Altman has succeeded in pinpointing an urge for companionship which not only excludes women, but also degrades them. The need to escape in this way usually springs from fear. Locker-room jokes, rugby songs, tales of prowess in the public bar - all are thin cover for anxiety about sex, concern over performance; the embarrassment of the boy scout who isn't quite prepared. Retreat into comradeship offers an escape from - often even a substitute for - the complexities of emotional involvement between man and woman. Partners feed the ego; women break it.

But the parody in *California Split* is inconsistent. Distance is not sustained. At times the film is playful; often it's very funny. Ultimately, though, the underlying sentiment is that men are better than women. They are more fun, better sports, firmer friends, and more steadfast lovers. As in the westerns and the gangster films, we're always aware that it's a fantasy - but the feeling is that it's a wistful one. Ironies, and hence values, have been confused. In portraying those who disparage women, the film itself disparages women, and seems to confirm the view that without them we'd all be better off.

Sally Feldman

DOROTHY ARZNER

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bfi

Women's Music from America available here at last

a checklist

"The only thing is to do it yourself," said Saffron Summerfield in *SR* 30, describing how she produced her own record and released it on her own label. Not everybody has the money or the confidence – or, as Saffron has, the reputation – to support such a step, but she intends to share her experience with other women who want to make records. As some readers will know, a few opportunities like that already exist in the US, and have led to the production of significant records. But just how many of these records there are, and what they are like, and how you can get them, is information not easily gathered. So here are the beginnings of a checklist.

The largest group of women's records on one label is Rounder's. (Rounder is an independent record company and a radical collective, based near Boston.) *Mountain Moving Day* (Rounder 4001), by the Chicago and New Haven Women's Liberation Rock Bands (a side each), has been around for a while – long enough for one of the bands to break up since – and is the only out-and-out rock-band record the movement has produced. *Honor Thy Womanself* (4006), by the Arlington Street Women's Caucus, is quite different music: choral songs by the whole group, including the famous 'Bread and Roses', written in the 1912 mill strikes of Lawrence, Massachusetts, and solo numbers by Terry Dash (vocal/guitar) and Carolyn McDade (vocal/autoharp), who composed about half the songs on the record.

Rounder's main work is in traditional US country music, and this part of their catalogue includes two excellent new records by women singers: the Hazel & Alice LP (0027), which Sheila Rowbotham wrote about in *SR* 27, and an album by Ola Belle Reed (0021). Ola Belle Reed is from North Carolina and has been working in old-time and bluegrass music for many years. Much of her record is music from this tradition, with stringband accompaniment from members of her family, but she writes her own material as well, which expresses her conviction "that life can be made qualitatively better . . . only by a community sharing and working together."

Rounder has also issued an album of songs by Aunt Molly Jackson (1002). Aunt Molly lived, fought and sang for the miners of her native Kentucky, and luckily many of her songs were preserved by the Archive of Folk Song in the Library of Congress during the 30s. It's from this source that the Rounder LP comes, and it's as powerful a unionist statement as it is a gripping record of true mountain singing. Some of her compositions have also been recorded by her half-sister Sarah Ogan Gunning on an LP available in Britain, *A Girl of Constant Sorrow* (Topic 12T171).

Among companies devoted exclusively to women's music, foremost so far seems to be Thunderbird Records, with their collection *Virgo Rising: The Once and Future Woman* (Thunderbird 7037). The contributors include Malvina Reynolds, writer of 'Little Boxes', whom the notes describe as "piquant, mysterious, exuberant and down-home." She has three memorable songs here, 'No Hole in My Head', 'No Room', and 'We Don't Need The Men'. Janet Smith is an excellent blues guitarist and funny, wry songwriter ('Talking Want Ad', 'Mama's Peaches'). Other participants are Nancy Raven, Kit Miller and the trio Charley's Aunts. The record, says its producer Mollie Gregory, "is about the whole woman . . . our growing awareness of what is – and of what can be."

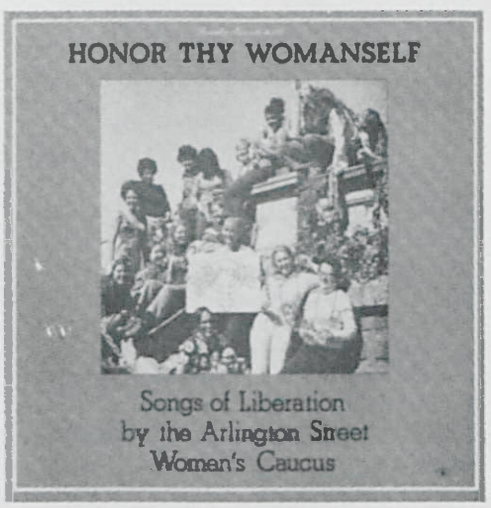
There's also an album by the California singer/writer Holly Near, *Hang In There,* on Redwood Records; and a lesbian group in New York, Women's Wax Works, has put out *Lavender Jane Loves Women* (WWW A001). Both have been well spoken of, but copies haven't (to my knowledge) reached Britain yet.

There is sure to be much more happening than this list implies, and one way of finding out about it – and about the festivals and concerts and so forth that go on regardless of what record-companies elect to do – is the women's music magazine *Paid My Dues*, which appears quarterly out of Milwaukee and has three (or maybe by now four) issues in print. It reaches across the divisions of rock, folk and so on to cover all kinds of women's music-making, and it offers a lot of contacts.

Other magazines run more or less regular women's issues. *Sing Out!* did one a couple of years ago, and the California magazine *Folk Scene* has done two — the second (dated December 1974) has features on Janis Ian, Tammy Wynette and Dolly Parton, reviews of some of the records already mentioned, and words and music for Janet Smith's 'Mama's Peaches'.

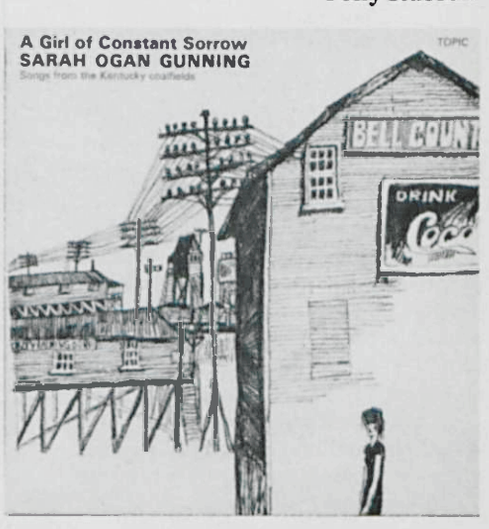
With so much worthwhile material available, it seemed important to create a simpler method of making it accessible than just listing US addresses and leaving readers all the cost and hassle of international money-orders and such. So in an effort to maintain a British link with US activity in women's music, our company String Records has started a mail-order supply of the records listed here (most are in stock as I write, at £2.50 each post paid; the Holly Near and *Lavender Jane* LPs, however, aren't yet) and of *Paid My Dues* (issues 1–3 available at 45p each post paid). Hopefully we shall be able to add whatever appears from now on. A more detailed list, with song-titles, is available: send a SAE to String Records, 33 Brunswick Gardens, London W8 4AW.

Tony Russell









Discrimination in Orchestras



Women organise in the Musicians Union

By Liz Hambleton

March '74, Daily Mail*: "New manager of London Symphony Orchestra said it was his intention to carry out the orchestra's proud intention of maintaining it a single sex orchestra." A statement later retracted after furious complaints.*

February '75, Sunday Mirror*: "The London Symphony Orchestra said, 'All women who apply are auditioned. Jobs are given on a purely musical basis, not a sexist one.' And yet there is not* one *woman, except the inevitable harpist, playing with them on a regular basis!*

The present co-principal clarinet of the Royal Philharmonic, Prudence Whittacker, and one of the two only women members was so much better than the other applicants that the other co-principal, Anthony Page, threatened to resign unless she was given the job.

Alex Cameron, principal cello of the London Philharmonic Orchestra will not have women at all in his section.

Such examples are legion in the music profession and occur at every level and in all fields. Women represent only 15% of Central London Branch membership of the Musicians Union and yet *more* than 50% of all music students are women. It is time the question was asked "What happens to women between leaving college and getting a job?" as in no other profession is there such a waste of training and talent.

Orchestras are obliged as a condition of their Arts Council grant to hold auditions when vacancies arise, but they do not necessarily have to *hear* everyone who applies. "We just wouldn't have the time and anyway many don't have enough of the right kind of experience . . . or obviously wouldn't be good enough from the information that they send" are the reasons usually given. A well known practice also is for auditions to be 'fixed' in advance, often over a pint in the pub, when the management decides who they want for the job before the auditions, no matter who else comes down from Hull, etc., at their own personal expense and no matter who may be auditioning. This happened recently at Covent Garden and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

So in many cases auditioning for women is a complete waste of time and the attitude fostered forty years ago by the conductor Sir Thomas Beecham is still prevalent. He originated such remarks as "If a lady is not well-favoured, the gentlemen of the orchestra do not wish to play near her. If she is, they can't." Even women who achieve prominent positions are reticent about their success and because of the competitive nature of the business are unwilling to risk anything by being outspoken.

So progress is slow and at present the London Philharmonic Orchestra, for example, has seven women out of 89, the BBC Symphony 16 out of 105, and Covent Garden Opera 12 out of 90. The provincial orchestras are more liberal but still have a long way to go, e.g., Halle 26 out of 92, Bournemouth 20 out of 85. In the touring ballet and opera orchestras there is the best record but for the wrong reasons. Here the ratio may be 50/50 but this is largely because women are always to be found where there is provincial touring to be done and comparatively low wages, as employers cannot afford to discriminate or they wouldn't have an orchestra at all.

Every orchestra draws on freelance players to make up the numbers and this work is fair game for the women who may not want to or can't get a permanent job. It is easier in this field but discrimination is almost impossible to eliminate as managers simply don't ring anyone they choose not to. Nothing is written down so nothing can be proved. Finally the West End theatres, commercial recordings and film sessions are fairly exclusively reserved for men, barring a few exceptions, or the inevitable 'token' woman.

So if the forthcoming Equal Rights Bill is to have any teeth at all in music, several things must happen, and happen soon.

First and most important, there must be a system of fair auditions involving concealment of identity until the decision is made. Any kind of alternative to this would be open to abuse. The Womens Sub-Committee of the Central London Branch of the Musicians Union is very keen on this and it is hoped to put forward practical suggestions soon at a meeting on the implications of the Equal Rights Bill, between the managements of the LPO, RPO, NPO, and LSO, and the union.

Secondly, women must become more active in union affairs. The difficulty of organising women in the non-classical fields (i.e. pop, dance band, jazz clubs) is due to low union membership. We can only fight for the implementation of the Bill from *within* the union. In the classical field, although unionised of necessity or they wouldn't get the work, women need to be much more active, get on their orchestral committees and fight for fair promotion, equal treatment and adequate facilities.

Thirdly, maternity leave is at present almost non-existent. While this area remains 'unlegislated', the lack of guidelines will perpetuate the present emotive confusion, the (unproved) line of 'biology is destiny' and give employers the means of using maternity as a pretext for keeping women out. At present the confusion influences managements even against those who have

no boyfriend/husband anyway, and those who have no intention of having children or whose boyfriends/husbands accept equal responsibility for child-rearing. We need a clear ruling on this, which due to the unsocial hours worked, would include an optional unpaid period after the agreed paid leave has expired, during which time the job is kept open. Also needed are creches at the work place for use by both mothers and fathers.

Lastly, the introduction of 'job sharing' or 'twinning' where two people cover one position, share one salary and decide themselves how best to divide the work. As their value to the employer would obviously be influenced by how well they arrange things, the musicians would be obliged to adopt a responsible approach. (This is already done between the two principal clarinets in the RPO.) Some of the orchestras work extremely long hours; a 70 hour week is quite common in a symphony orchestra. In many cases this destroys a positive and creative approach to the work, puts those with families under considerable stress and is the main reason for the high turnover of personnel in orchestras. Job sharing would be an effective way to combat this and it is doubtful whether the disadvantages of such a system would outweigh its advantages. The overworked musician who is little more than a note machine is unique to London and surely the present situation need not be the only framework in which the city can maintain its undoubted reputation as the musical capital of the world.



Cartoon by Gilli Harry

Liz Hambleton, a violinist, has played with Sadlers Wells Opera, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and now freelances mainly in opera and chamber orchestras and also teaches. She initiated the Musicians Union Womens Sub-Committee and also is Secretary of the Co-ordinating Committee of the London Working Womens' Charter Campaign.

Northern Women's Liberation Rock Band Manifesto

Why are there hardly any women's rock bands?
Women are held back in the sphere of music as they are in any other sphere of life. They aren't the people who think, create and contribute to society – their place is in the home, looking after their husbands and bringing up kids. Rock music is specially male dominated and prejudiced against women. Women are mostly put down as too birdbrained to get a band together, and besides, only men can handle the complex electronic equipment – women would only electrocute themselves.

Is pop music insulting to women?
Pop lyrics present women as sex objects for men. Nowadays no-one would dare to insult blacks by singing songs about golliwogs, but men think nothing of singing about women as "baby", "doll", "my girl", in other words as their playthings, their possessions. Women are not encouraged to be strong and independent beings in their own right. Instead, commercial pop songs present for them a world in which true love is their only goal and men are the only source of sadness, joy, or meaning in their lives. These songs help to keep women in their accustomed role of wives and mothers, dependent on men, because they hide the real conflicts in women's lives and relationships with men and so prevent them understanding their oppression.

Is music important?
It may seem puzzling to have such strong opinions about pop music – you may think: why get so worked up about it, after all they're only songs. But all music says something; it is an expression of feelings, a powerful means of communication, and it contains a certain view of life, supports a certain order of things. Unless we use music to express women's fight against oppression, to encourage other women to stand up with us, it will always support the established order of men as the stronger and women as the weaker, passive sex.

Is music made by superstars?
Pop music comes from ordinary people, mainly young people. Anyone who could strum three chords on a guitar could play rock'n'roll, could be part of the skiffle craze. Groups like the Beatles created a simple, popular, unprofessional sound. But music is controlled by a gang of male, profit-hungry parasites, who take only what is marketable from the music and sell it back to the people. They take away the power of people to express themselves through music and turn music into a power over them. They create the superstar who is a sex-idol for his audience. His performance is based on ego-tripping, his music is aggressive, competitive, sadistic, his instruments are weapons of his sexual power over the audience. This music matches the social set-up where people use it, dances, parties, etc. – where people go to pick up someone.

How can we as women change things?
Few women sing about their oppression, or if they do it is without wanting to change it. Our band comes from the women's liberation movement, and we are trying to create music that expresses the new values and relationships the movement is creating, of women standing up for themselves against male domination. Our songs are about women's hardships in the home, at work and in their social life, about women fighting back, having a good time together without men, about how *we* want to be. We want also to make socials not places where women get picked up, but where women can feel free to enjoy themselves and be themselves, where the band are not superstars and sex idols, but using music in a collective and supporting way. It is the women's movement, not the commercial circuit, that has made our music. We don't want to manipulate our audience but to build the common ground between us, and the women we sing about, and the women we sing to – our unity against the oppression of all women.

We hope this manifesto will be a basis for what we are trying to build, and what we are trying to put into practice each time we play.

Copies of this manifesto with lyrics available from: Northern Women's Liberation Rock Band (Nov. 1974), c/o The Women's Centre, 218 Upper Brook Street, Manchester 13 (061-273 2287).

Sweet Sixteen And Never Been Shown

"Sweet Sixteen And Never Been Shown", an exhibition by The Women's Free Arts Alliance, was held from 15th–22nd February at their King Henry's Road, Chalk Farm premises. The exhibition, primarily of the visual arts, was both a farewell to the old building in which the Alliance, a group of women artists, have worked for the past two years, and also a means of raising funds and interest for the new building they hope to move to in Chalk Farm Road.

At an early stage in the planning it was decided to also represent a cross section of the activities of women in the performing arts, including theatre, dance and music. On the opening night, an improvised piece, "A Dance By Chance", was performed by Jane Wilson, accompanied by Terry Quaye on congas and Bridget Hare, oboe. Terry, (who regularly plays with Amalgam and the John Stevens Dance Orchestra), and Bridget span out a varied texture of sound which Jane interpreted in movement, hypnotising the audience. Next came a very recently formed women's rock band called the Girl Guides, who played a short set of self-penned numbers ranging in style from rock'n'roll to country, with soul somewhere in the middle.

Lady June concluded the evening with renderings of her own poetry, to the accompaniment of a trio of bass, woodwind and piano. The only complaint we'd make here is that two of Lady June's backing musicians were male; an anomaly in an exhibition which was conceived, planned and executed by women.

In terms of performers, a conscious understanding and collective sharing of responsibility would have resulted in a more worthwhile event.

By Marion Lees and Caroline Gilfillan, members of the Girl Guides, who may be contacted at (01) 735 9423.

SELF HELP HERBS

BY RUTH HAMBLIN

ILLUSTRATED BY AMYE ROSENBERG



Marshmallow (Althaea from Greek meaning 'I cure')
It is a hairy herb with lobed leaves and two to three feet high stem, and grows in marshes.



Peppermint
Also called Brandy mint, Balm mint and Curled mint. It grows on a stem purplish from two to three feet high, with stalked leaves two to three inches long, serrated and slightly hairy. The flowers are purplish in colour and grow on top of the branches.



Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)
Also known as Milfoil, Thousand-leaf, Nosebleed, Old Man's Pepper, Soldier's Woundwort. It grows on grassy banks and fields. It has a rough, downy stem 12 to 15 inches tall. The leaves are long and one inch broad. The flowers are pink and in small flat terminal clusters.



Chamomile (Matricaria, from matrix meaning mother, referring to medicinal use of plant)
The stem is six to 12 inches high and the flowers are quite large with yellow centres. It is found on waste land.

When I heard about the medicinal use of herbs I thought I may as well try them. They cannot do any harm, unlike antibiotics which destroy my natural powers of resistance. Used appropriately and combined with understanding of your body, herbs can prevent a lot of suffering and help maintain and regain positive health.

The action of herbs is slow so don't expect immediate cure after one or two cups. When you start to use a herb you will need to take it several times a day for several days or more until you feel restored and strong.

Cystitis – bladder infection

I often used to get cystitis and kidney pains. I must have had cystitis eight times and always went to a G.P. who gave me antibiotics which got rid of the immediate attack but I still had recurrences. I started making my own barley water out of ordinary pearl-barley simmered in water with a level teaspoon of dried parsley to each mug of liquid (you can use fresh parsley if you can get it). I have also stopped using common salt and started using sea salt which is much better balanced. These things may sound rather too simple and easy to be true but I have not had cystitis since. I must stress that herbs can only prevent trouble if you use them in time at the very first twinge, itch or hotness when peeing. Start straight away and keep warm and rest as much as possible. Drink the barley water and parsley many times a day for several days and the symptoms go away. You could use couchgrass and/or raw horseradish but I haven't tried those myself.

Menstruation

For many years I had congestion of the uterus (a swollen abdomen) before my period. There are three herbs that get rid of the excess liquid that gathers in the body just before a period. Marjoram, rosemary and thyme are all easy to find in any supermarket. Just make tea out of them and drink it instead of coffee or Indian tea. Use a pinch of each to a cup of boiling water, don't add milk but sweeten it with sugar or honey as it tastes a bit odd. You get used to its taste and very soon your swollen belly will go down.

I also used to suffer from very heavy bleeding during periods. Doctors were unconcerned but eventually gave me a D and C which made it much worse. Then I discovered yarrow. Yarrow is a wonderful herb which reduces menstrual bleeding and all excessive production of liquids in the body. It's helpful too if you have a lot of phlegm on your chest. If you



Balm
Also called Sweet Balm, Lemon Balm, Honey Plant, Cure-All. It grows in woods and gardens with dark green, serrated, wrinkled leaves. Small white flowers grow near the stem.

are using it for heavy periods start drinking yarrow tea as soon as the bleeding is established. You will have to find out how much your body needs. You can bleed as little as you want by adjusting the amount you use. You may start off with a teaspoon of yarrow to a cup; if your period stops entirely wait until it starts again then take a little less, or if it doesn't slow down enough make the tea stronger. Remember that physical exertion and heat increases bleeding. Yarrow is really good and I hope that everyone who bleeds too much will use it to avoid losing iron and becoming weak and anaemic. You can get it from a herbalist or you can pick it yourself once you can recognise it as it is a very common plant.

For menstrual pain try catnip. To regularise menstruation try marjoram, mint and thyme.

Anytime you have swollen or painful breasts use marshmallow leaf lotion. Just pour boiling water on the leaves, strain it, cool it a little and put it on your breast. Marshmallow is very cooling; for any inflammation on your body use the lotion and for internal inflammations drink it as tea.

For abscesses, spots, whitlows or boils you can use marshmallow mixed with thyme and marigold.

Pregnancy

For those of my sisters who are pregnant I would like to mention raspberry leaves – for hundreds of years women wouldn't have dreamed of being pregnant without drinking raspberry leaf tea. Drink it regularly throughout pregnancy. It has a very beneficial effect on the muscles of the pelvic floor making childbirth easier as it tones the muscles used for delivering the baby. Raspberry fruits have the same effect but you can keep the leaves all the year if you collect them while they are in their prime, or get them from a herbalist. They are also said to help bring down the afterbirth and increase fertility. My friend who used raspberry leaves had a very easy second stage of labour and her baby was delivered in only three pushes. To increase milk flow try borage leaves, hops, milkwort, sage, watercress, woodruff.

Coughs, tonsillitis and mouth ulcers

Coltsfoot is one of the oldest known remedies for coughs. Herbalists usually make their own mixtures of herbs for coughs. Comfrey has exceptionally powerful healing properties. Whenever I feel the slightest sore throat coming on, or the beginning of a mouth ulcer, I make some comfrey tea and keep sipping it and swilling it about my mouth and throat. If you catch the first signs and start taking comfrey soon enough, it really does stop infections from developing; I haven't had tonsillitis since I started using it.

Stomach upsets

For nausea, vomiting or indigestion use the following herbs:
chamomile, basil and peppermint. For nervous stomachs use balm.

Insomnia

If you can't sleep at night make yourself some tea out of cowslip and red clover flowers.

Hair

Hair, teeth and nails all benefit from eating oats in any form, porage, muesli or oat cakes. If your hair is scraggy, broken and looks like last year's hay, there is a tonic that will strengthen and improve it. Pour boiling water onto nettles and yarrow; if you have fair hair add chamomile, and if you have dark hair add rosemary and red sage. After you have finished washing your hair, pour the strained liquid over your head, and don't rinse it off.

After you have found your herbs store them in an air-tight container and protect them from the light. When you come to use them don't simmer them in a metal pan, use enamel. There are different ways of preparing your herb teas, the easiest way is to get a tea strainer, put the herbs in it, place it over a cup and pour boiling water over the herbs until it covers them, then leave it for a minute or two. Another way is to simmer herbs and water in an enamelled pan but don't let the tea boil, then strain it. You can always mix different combinations of herbs together.

If you become more and more sensitive to what is happening in your body and learn to recognise signs and symptoms early, use the appropriate herb straight away and most troubles will disappear, but if it has developed beyond your body's ability to cope with it you will have to use your own judgement about seeking medical aid, and not assume that herbs will perform miracles.

Women have been using herbs for hundreds of years and it's only comparatively recently that knowledge of herbs ceased to be common knowledge. I hope that soon many of us will rediscover the uses of herbs and with them become more self sufficient.

Useful reading:

Herbs for Health and Beauty by S. Beedell.
Herbal Handbook for Everyone by V. Levi.
Concise English Flora in Colour by Rev. W. Keeble Martin.



Coltsfoot (or Tussilago from Latin tussis, a cough)

It has solitary yellow flowers on the stem heads and is found in clayey fields.



Catnip (Nepita cataria)

Also known as catmint. It grows in hedgerows and on waste ground and has become a garden plant. It is two to three feet high, the stems are square and at every junction there are two broad leaves, covered with down, nicked at the edges and aromatic. The flowers are purple-white and grow in tufts at the top of the branches and lower down the stems. The stems and leaves are so covered with down, they look white.



Comfrey

It grows on river banks and moist ground. It has purple or yellowish white flowers, a three feet high stem and hairy, dull green leaves.



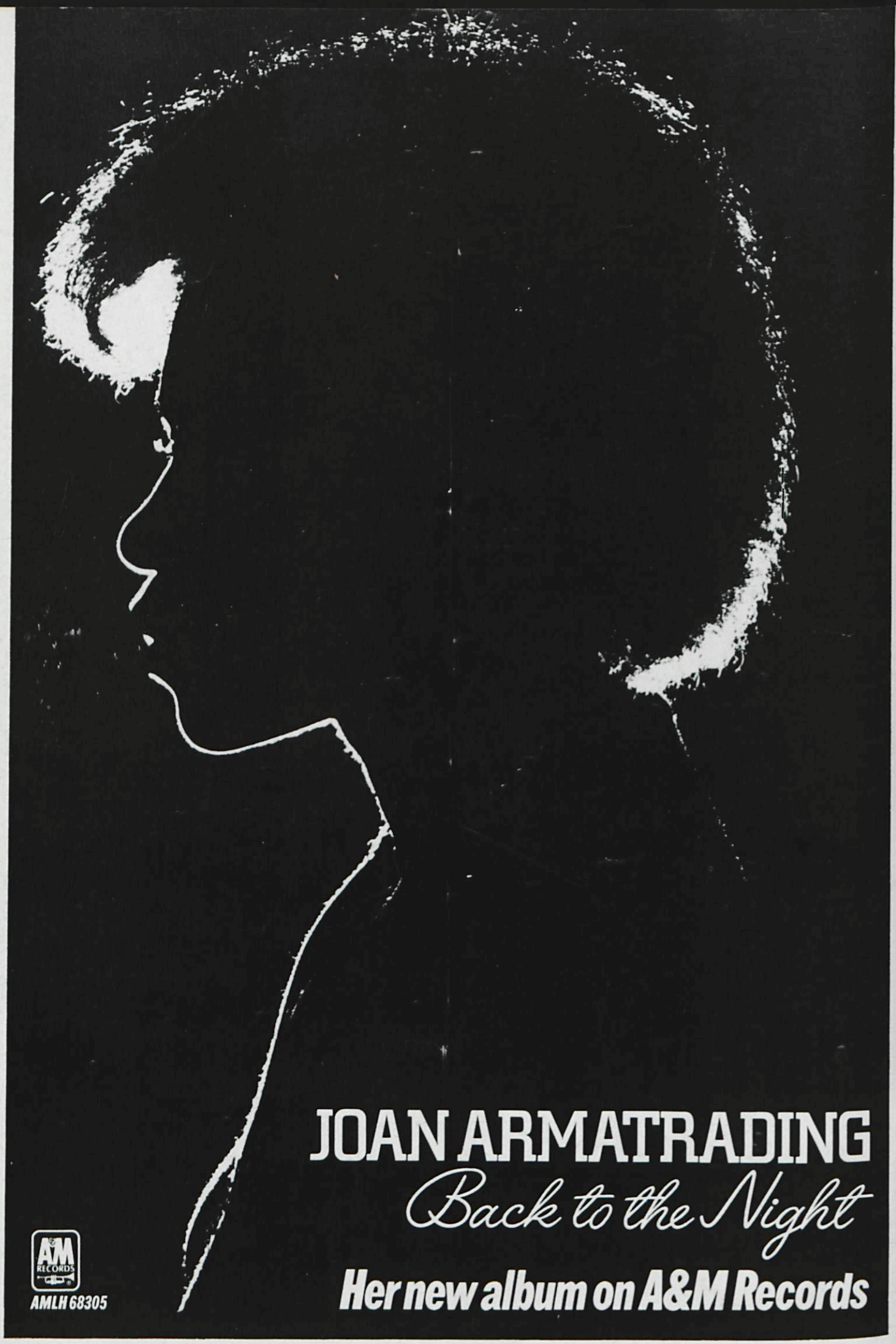
Sage, red (Slavio, Latin meaning 'I am well')

It grows in dry fields. The stem is one to two feet high with blunt, wrinkled, oblong leaves.



Raspberry (Rubus idaeus)

Also known as Hindleberry, Gentler Berry.


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